

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BURNOUT,  
EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-PERCEIVED  
EMPLOYABILITY AMONGST EMPLOYEES IN THE  
SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SECTOR**

**by  
Zwane Ntombifuthi**

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**SUPERVISOR: PROF. R. M. OOSTHUIZEN**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the above dissertation/thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Zwane Ntombifuthi

Student number: 50782630

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## **Abstract**

**Orientation:** The employee engagement approach has been utilised to combat burnout in both private and public sector institutions. With increasing research, self-perceived employability is gaining popularity as an effective tool to reduce burnout in the contemporary world of work. Knowledge of the relationship between these three constructs is therefore important for public sector institutions and researchers in industrial and organisational psychology in South Africa.

**Research purpose:** The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector.

**Motivation for study:** Numerous studies have highlighted the prevalence of poor service delivery in public sector institutions as linked to employees feeling disconnected from their work as a result of numerous burnout symptoms. A plethora of studies have emphasised the significance of employee engagement in reducing burnout. With increasing research, focus has also been on the employability construct as a tool to manage burnout in the ever-changing working environment and the labour market. Both employee engagement and self-perceived employability have been utilised as approaches to reduce burnout amongst employees. However, the relationship between these three constructs is unknown, and therefore the findings of this study will be crucial for both public sector institutions and researchers in industrial and organisational psychology in South Africa.

**Research design, approach and method:** The researcher conducted a quantitative study. It involved a non-probability sample of 158 South African public sector employees. Correlational and descriptive statistical analyses were utilised to analyse the data.

**Main findings:** Burnout has a significant negative relationship with employee engagement; however, burnout does not significantly correlate with self-perceived employability. There are significant differences between the various biographical groups and burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

**Practical/managerial implications:** Approaches to reducing burnout amongst employees should consider employee engagement and self-perceived employability as effective tools to enhance employees' wellness, morale and productivity. Improving the engagement levels of employees and enhancing their employability will greatly improve the well-being of employees in public sector institutions and help alleviate the actual employee burnout.

**Keywords:** burnout, employee engagement, self-perceived employability, public sector, non-human services sector

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my heart greatly rejoice; and with my song I will praise him” – Psalms 27:7.

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## **Summary**

The objectives of the study were to (1) determine the relationship between burnout (measured by Maslach Burnout Inventory), employee engagement (measured by the employee engagement survey) and self-perceived employability (measured by the Employability Attributes Scale), and (2) to determine whether age, gender, race, marital status and tenure groups differ significantly regarding burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

A quantitative survey was conducted on a convenience sample (N = 158) of employees within a South African public sector.

Correlational and inferential statistical analyses revealed significant relationships between burnout and employee engagement as well as significant differences between gender, race, qualification and tenure groups on some dimensions of the constructs.

These findings contribute valuable insights and knowledge that are important for public sector institutions and researchers in industrial and organisational psychology in South Africa.

The study concluded with recommendations for future research and practice.

### **KEY TERMS:**

Burnout, employee engagement, work engagement, self-perceived employability, employability, South African public sector, human services occupations, wellness and productivity, quantitative study, industrial and organisational psychology

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## **List of acronyms and abbreviations**

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CY	Cynicism
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
EAS	Employability Attributes Scale
EE	Exhaustion
E EI	Employee Engagement Dimensions scale
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
IOP	Industrial and Organisational Psychology
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources
MBI-SS	Maslach Burnout Inventory
PE	Professional Efficacy
RERC	Ethics Review Committee
SAS	Statistical Analysis System
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **SCIENTIFIC ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH**

### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

This study focused on the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector. This chapter (Chapter 1) discusses the background and motivation for the research topic, the problem statement, the research questions, as well as the theoretical and empirical objectives. In addition, a theoretical paradigm that underpins the study is presented as well as the research design and research method. Lastly, the chapter provides an outline for the layout of the study.

### **1.2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

The promotion of employee health and wellness in organisations is regarded as a crucial factor for organisational success. Organisations have attempted to improve employee health and well-being, and to advance human potential (Usman & Raja, 2013; Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, De Witte, & Lens, 2008). Evidence of this is demonstrated through the programmatic interventions in the workplace such as wellness programmes aimed at promoting the well-being of employees (Mattke et al., 2013; Van den Broeck et al., 2008). This demonstrates the constant interventions implemented by organisations to address psychosocial stressors for enhancing employees' health, wellness and morale. A practical example of this is in South African public sector institutions (Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA), 2015; DPSA, 2016).

However, larger numbers of employees around the world, from both private and public sectors, for example the United States of America, Canada, Taiwan, Japan, Ghana and South Africa, still suffer from numerous stressors. This may cause employees to experience certain levels of burnout (Lindén, Salo, & Jansson, 2016; Hirayama & Fernando, 2016; Palazzo; Carlotto, & Aerts, 2012; Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009).

The literature shows that a myriad of burnout experiences in the public sector institutions encompass employees feeling undervalued, chronic fatigue and feeling disconnected from the objectives of their public institutions (Bell & Bell, 2010). These

experiences are associated with their unsuccessful attempts at improving the quality of services because of the lack of available resources (Hirayama & Fernando, 2016). According to Schaufeli et al. (2009), public sector organisations in the twenty-first century have a tendency of stating ideals that far exceed their resources (Hirayama & Fernando, 2016). Many countries devote inadequate resources to meet their populations' needs (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Lack of these resources may contribute to poor well-being, as they elicit burnout (Van den Broeck, De Cuyper, Luyckx, & De Witte, 2012; Hirayama & Fernando, 2016).

Traditionally, the concept of burnout was viewed as a crucial but negative, pathological purview since the 1970s (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Research on burnout focused on the suffering of employees such as chronic stressors and malfunctioning (Schaufeli et al., 2009). With increasing research in the field around the 1990s, a new approach, so-called positive psychology, emerged (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Schaufeli et al., 2009). The emergence of positive psychology led to a paradigm shift from the traditional pathological purview of psychology in the context of burnout to the more comprehensive and dynamic approach of employee engagement (Kataria, Garg, & Rastogi, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

The flourishing of positive psychology in the new millennium reinforced the concept of employee engagement in the workplace as an approach to dealing with the issue of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2009). According to Nienaber and Martins (2016), employee engagement is about the relationship between employees' occupational roles and their organisations. It focuses on the individual's involvement and satisfaction and enthusiasm for work (Nienaber & Martins, 2016). It also has a positive impact on the psychological well-being of employees (Kahn, 1990).

Engaged employees are more productive, more committed and more likely to remain with their employer (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Kosuta, 2010; Moodley, 2010; Vigoda-Gadot, Eldor, & Schohat, 2012). They have a sense of energy, close involvement with their job, and the ability to deal well with the demands of their job (Schaufeli, Taris, & van Rhenen, 2008). In addition, engaged employees perceive themselves as being in control and perceive the workload as sustainable. This is directly the opposite of burnout, of having no control and perceiving an excessive and unattainable workload (Moodley, 2010).

Research shows that the employee engagement approach has been implemented by organisations as a mechanism to reduce burnout amongst employees (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007; Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Numerous public sector institutions in the world have adopted the employee engagement approach to survive in the global economy (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Kosuta, 2010). This is an indication that employee engagement is utilised as a coping mechanism in the labour market. In South Africa, for instance, the employee engagement approach is utilised by the public sector to reduce burnout related symptoms and increase the level of employee engagement (DPSA, 2014; DPSA, 2016). Yet numerous studies show that public sector employees in South Africa still experience an increase in the symptoms of burnout (Lindén et al., 2016; Hirayama & Fernando, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Maslach, 2011). This is because of job stressors in the work organisation such as workload, job control, reward, community, fairness and values (Lindén et al., 2016).

Within the contemporary, dynamic and turbulent economy of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace, which presents employers with unique challenges regarding engaging and satisfying employees (Gupta & Sharma, 2016), the need to reduce psychosocial stressors amongst employees continues. In the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world of work, there has been a focus on new ways of addressing employees' psychosocial stressors, such as focusing on psychosocial meta-capacities of employability (Coetzee, Roythorne-Jacobs, & Mensele, 2016). The workplace in this contemporary world is undergoing a new psychological contract between employers and employees which places emphasis on the employability of the employee rather than job security (Coetzee et al., 2016).

Self-perceived employability in this context refers to individuals' self-perception of their capabilities of obtaining and retaining fulfilling work, and having the knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes to move self-sufficiently within the labour market (Coetzee et al., 2016). As a result, there has been focus on new mechanisms of addressing employees' psychosocial stressors, such as focusing on psychosocial meta-capacities of employability (Coetzee et al., 2016).

Self-perception of employability refers to individuals' perceptions and beliefs about their possibilities to succeed in obtaining and retaining the best employment opportunities in the labour market (Qenani, MacDougall, & Sexton, 2014). Normally

individuals reach conclusions based on their level of self-perception; therefore, the beliefs that individuals hold about their employment capabilities can determine how they feel, behave and perform in their jobs. Self-perceptions, in general, influence individual behaviour, feelings, health, emotions, and happiness throughout life (Qenani et al., 2014).

Employees who perceive themselves employable associate with feelings of job security and independence, motivations, and behaviours that can lead to better job performance, and resilience to adversity, more successful careers, and better health and life satisfaction (Qenani et al., 2014). According to Coetzee et al. (2016), self-perceived employability relates to employees' motivation at work and proactive coping mechanisms with change and performance.

Within the self-perceived employability context in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world of work, the way employees perceive themselves in terms of being in control of their work situation for securing their employment is integral to their coping mechanisms to survive in the global market (Coetzee et al., 2016). If literature has proven the same about employee engagement, that engaged employees perceive themselves as being in control and as having sustainable workloads (Moodley, 2010), the following could be asked: Could this mean that self-perceived employability is the updated intervention strategy for addressing burnout in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world of work? or would it mean that self-perceived employability as an intervention strategy complements and expands the intervention strategy of employee engagement in addressing psychosocial stressors?

If both employee engagement and self-perceived employability appear as intervention strategies to address psychosocial stressors among employees, could this mean the existence of a relationship between these two constructs or are they merely independent? In addition, can this study find an existing relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability, respectively, amongst employees in the South African public sector? It appears from the literature that there are hardly any studies that investigated the relationship between these three constructs. Few studies have been conducted on the relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability. But there is a dire shortage of studies on the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

The purpose of this study was to explore any existing relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector. In the 21st-century world of work characterised by constant changes and instability, would employee engagement and self-perceived employability be useful approaches to unleashing and advancing human capital and employee well-being?

### **1.3. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Numerous studies have been conducted on the relationship between burnout and employee engagement within the South African public sector (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Most of these studies stem from relatively stressful work environments that are related to the human services such as the police, healthcare, and social welfare (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Studies which are conducted in the South African context with a focus beyond the human services occupations such as managers and white-collar employees are very limited. The current study focused on a South African public sector institution which has a core mandate beyond the human services occupations.

Furthermore, employee engagement has been used as an intervention to erode burnout amongst employees in organisations for over two decades now. Yet employees currently experience levels of burnout in the workplace. Current literature has considered the postmodern workplace environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and newly emerged constructs such as self-perceived employability have gained significant popularity in the literature as important and relevant coping resource mechanisms (Van der Vaart, 2012). However, fewer studies have looked at the relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability in terms of how they relate to each other.

In addition, there are hardly any studies that investigated self-perceived employability as a psychosocial resource mechanism for the issues of burnout and employee engagement. There is therefore a lack of, or an absence of, studies that investigated the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector. Based on this identified research problem, research questions pertaining to the literature review and the empirical study can be articulated:

### **1.3.1. Research questions pertaining to the literature review**

- How is burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees conceptualised from a theoretical perspective?
- How is the theoretical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees conceptualised in the literature?
- What role do the biographical variables age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure play on burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees?
- What recommendations can be formulated for industrial psychology practices, public sector institutions and future research?

### **1.3.2. Research questions pertaining to the empirical study**

- What is the nature of the empirical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst the South African public sector institutions?
- Does employee engagement and self-perceived employability negatively relate to burnout amongst the South African public sector institutions?
- What is the relationship between the demographic variables (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure), burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst the South African public sector institutions?
- Do the South African public sector employees, from the various demographic groups (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure) differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability?
- What recommendations can be formulated for industrial psychology practices, public sector institutions and future research, based on the literature and empirical findings of this research regarding burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector?

It was thus the intention of this study to investigate the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector. The study was envisaged to add value both theoretically

and practically: theoretically, a contribution for fulfilling the identified gap in the literature regarding the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability; and practically, recommendations to the field of industrial and organisational psychology and practice on how to address burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability issues amongst employees in the South African public sector.

#### **1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Based on the above research problems, the following general and specific objectives were formulated:

##### **1.4.1. General objective**

The general objective of the study was to determine the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector.

##### **1.4.2. Specific objectives**

The following specific aims were identified for the study:

###### *1.4.2.1. Literature review*

- To conceptualise burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst the public sector employees from a theoretical perspective,
- To conceptualise the theoretical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees from the literature.
- To determine the role played by biographical variables (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure) in burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees.
- To formulate recommendations for industrial psychology practices and future research.



#### *1.4.2.2. Empirical study*

- To determine the empirical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in a sample of South African public sector employees.
- To determine whether employee engagement and self-perceived employability negatively relate with burnout amongst South African public sector employees.
- To determine whether the South African public sector employees from the various demographic groups (age, gender, race, marital status and tenure) differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.
- To formulate recommendations for industrial psychology practices and future research, based on the literature and empirical findings of this research regarding burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the public sector.

### **1.5. THE PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE**

This section outlines the relevant paradigms and market for intellectual resources utilised in this study.

#### **1.5.1. The relevant paradigms**

##### *1.5.1.1. Positive psychology paradigm*

The positive psychology paradigm is a science of positive subjective experiences which aims at improving the quality of life while preventing pathologies (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). In positive psychology, emphasis is placed on well-being, optimism and happiness. Burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability are presented in this study in terms of the positive paradigm (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Though the construct of burnout appears negative, but within the positive psychology paradigm, its effects are studied to improve the well-being of employees, thus strengthening their psychosocial resources such as resilience, optimism, employee engagement and emotional intelligence (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007).

#### *1.5.1.2. Humanistic paradigm*

The humanistic paradigm originated from the theories of Maslow, which include the psychology of humans in terms of meaningfulness, spirituality, purpose and self-actualisation (Weber, 2014). The humanistic paradigm is a school of thought of positive and unique experiences which manifest through introspection (Bergh & Theron, 2006). Emphasis is placed on the notion of the self as well as on the development of human potential, for instance self-actualisation. This paradigm facilitated determining the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability of workers.

### **1.5.2. The market for intellectual resources**

#### *1.5.2.1. Meta-theoretical statements*

The disciplinary context of this research is industrial psychology, more particularly employee and organisational wellness.

- *Industrial and organisational psychology (IOP)*

Industrial and organisational psychology (IOP) is the scientific discipline of human behaviour in the work context which focuses on improving the productivity and quality of life of employees (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; O'Driscoll & Taylor, 2007). As an academic field advancing scientific knowledge about people at work, IOP is concerned with applying scientific knowledge to deal with challenges in the workplace (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; O'Driscoll & Taylor, 2007).

- *Employee and organisational wellness*

In terms of the employee and organisational wellness approach, employees who enjoy their work tend to exercise self-direction, self-control and are committed to their work (Botha & Brand, 2009; Otenyo & Smith, 2017). Research has proven that employees can recover from unreasonable demands and that in the long run such experiences lead to job satisfaction, job involvement and career and organisational commitment (Botha & Brand, 2009; Otenyo & Smith, 2017).

#### *1.5.2.2. Theoretical models*

- *Job demands-resources (JD-R) model*

The job demands-resources model shows that burnout may result from a demanding occupation and job-related resources (Fragoso et al., 2016). High job demands due to lack of resources result in burnout symptoms (Kim, Shin, & Swanger, 2009), whilst job resources enhance a supportive work environment, which improves the reduction of burnout experiences (Kim et al., 2009). Basically, the JD-R model posits that job resources diminish the negative effects of job demands on exhaustion (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

- *Employee engagement model*

Nienaber and Martins (2014) designed a model for the South African context. The model refers to the relation that exists between the individual and the organisation (Nienaber & Martins (2014)). It also comprises seven components that represent the individual, team/department and organisational levels of engagement (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

- The individual level involves psychological traits, state and behavioural engagement;
- The team/departmental level comprises the components work, leadership and trust; and
- The organisational level is about organisational vision, mission, goals, purpose, strategy and competitive advantage to achieve organisational goals (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

- *Self-perceived employability model*

Bezuidenhout and Coetzee (2010) developed a self-perceived employability model for adult learners that explains the eight essential employability attributes: (1) career self-management; (2) cultural competence; (3) self-efficacy; (4) career resilience; (5) sociability; (6) entrepreneurial orientation; (7) proactivity, and (8) emotional literacy (Bezuidenhout & Coetzee, 2010).

### 1.5.2.3. *Conceptual descriptions*

The following concepts are described below: burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

- *Burnout*

The term “burnout” was first introduced by Freudenberger (1974) as a state of physical and emotional depletion resulting from the conditions of work. Although there is no universal agreement on the meaning of burnout, most authors have defined burnout as a consequence of prolonged and extensive exposure to job-related stresses (Toppinen-Tanner, Kalimo, & Mutanen, 2002; Tsigilis, Zachopoulou, & Grammatikopoulos, 2006). Burnout is commonly viewed as a multi-dimensional stress syndrome consisting of mental and emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, & Taris, 2008).

Burnout can also be explained in terms of the JD-R model (Kim et al., 2008). Within this perspective, job demands result in burnout symptoms when significant tangible or intangible efforts are required (Kim et al., 2008). However, job resources that enhance a supportive work environment and encourages independence assists in the reduction of burnout experiences (Kim et al., 2008).

- *Employee engagement*

Employee engagement denotes the personal alignment of employees towards their occupational roles (Kahn, 1990). It is viewed as a coping mechanism in which employees can survive symptoms of burnout (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). It taps into the cognitive, emotional and behavioural state of the individual employee directed at achieving organisational goals (Kosuta, 2010; Moodley, 2010; Schaufeli, et al., 2009). Employee engagement can be personified by three dimensions, namely energy, dedication and passion, which contribute towards the organisational goals (Kahn, 1990; Gupta & Sharma, 2016). This implies that engaged employees are actively involved in their activities, cognitively aware and emotionally connected to others when performing their jobs (Nienaber & Martins, 2016).

Nienaber and Martins (2016) associate the construct of employee engagement with a positive state of mind, which comprises cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance. In general, the construct employee engagement appears to be formed by components that lead to organisational success, such as commitment, involvement, attachment, discretionary

effort, profound connection, energy, positive attitude and psychological presence (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

- *Self-perceived employability*

Self-perceived employability is viewed as the perception of the individual's capability to obtain and retain employment in the labour market (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007, p. 20). The way employees perceive themselves in terms of being in control of their work situation for securing their employment is integral to self-perceived employability (Coetzee et al., 2016). According to Coetzee et al. (2016), self-perceived employability relates to the motivation of employees' work and it also serves as a proactive coping mechanism to survive in the global economy.

#### *1.5.2.4. Methodological convictions*

The approach followed in this study is quantitative. The central hypothesis is formulated as follows: *There is a statistically negative and significant relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.* The unit of analysis is the individual employee.

#### *1.5.2.5. Central hypothesis*

The following central hypothesis was formulated for the study:

*There is a significant relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.*

#### *1.5.2.6. Research hypotheses*

Based on the central hypothesis the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the demographic variables (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure), burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees.

H2: South African public sector employees from the various demographic groups (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure) differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

H3: Employee engagement and self-perceived employability relates negatively with burnout amongst public sector employees.

H4: There is a statistically significant negative relationship between burnout and employee engagement as manifested in a sample of public sector employees.

H5: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in a sample of public sector employees.

## **1.6. RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is a plan of how the researcher will respond to the research question (Mouton, 2001). The following aspects of the research design were addressed and are briefly defined below: research variables, type of research, unit of analysis, methods of ensuring reliability and validity.

### **1.6.1. Research variables**

The following three variables were identified for this study: public sector employees' experience of burnout, employee engagement, and perceived employability.

### **1.6.2. Type of research**

A quantitative approach was adopted in this study, using a survey design. Surveys are generally quantitative studies intended to provide a broad overview of a representative sample of a large population (Mouton, 2001). They can be utilised to determine relationships between variables for instance psychological (Salkind, 2012). In this study the survey design was used determine the relationship between the variables burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability among public sector employees.

### **1.6.3. Unit of analysis**

For this study the unit of analysis was an individual who is working in a non-human services public sector organisation in the South African public sector.

#### **1.6.4. Methods used to ensure reliability and validity**

This study adopted a systematic approach to both the theoretical and empirical investigations. In addition, reliable and valid measuring instruments were used for data collection.

##### *1.6.4.1. Validity*

To ensure validity, standardised measuring instruments, appropriate data analysis techniques, models and theories relevant to the research topic were utilised. In addition, a representative sample was utilised to obtain internal validity of the research findings.

The following were measures taken to ensure the validity of this study:

- Effective planning and structure of the research design to ensure the validity of the research findings.
- The use of models and theories relevant to research topic, aim and problem statement.
- Ensuring that the selected constructs were valid, appropriate and applicable.
- Selecting accurate, appropriate and applicable measuring instruments.
- Selecting a representative sample to ensure external validity.
- Collecting, storing and analysing data electronically.
- Ensuring data authenticity by means of encryption and password protection.
- Conducting appropriate and accurate data analysis.

##### *1.6.4.2. Reliability*

To ensure reliability, all instruments utilised were standardised instruments. The data was collected from only the South African public sector employees in a non-human services public sector organisation. The data analysis was conducted by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Software program version 23.0. To ensure the reliability of the measure, Cronbach's alpha coefficient (reliability analysis) was also computed.

In terms of the research process, the following control mechanisms were implemented to ensure reliability:

- The three measuring instruments used to collect data complied with stringent validity and reliability requirements.
- Only employees from the non-human services public sector institution were invited to participate in the study.
- All data collected was stored electronically by the administrator and access to this information was restricted to the researcher.
- Reliability in analysis was ensured by the use of statistical packages (SPSS & SAS) to analyse the data.
- Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to establish internal consistency and resultant reliabilities of the instruments used to collect data.

#### **1.6.5. Ethical research principles**

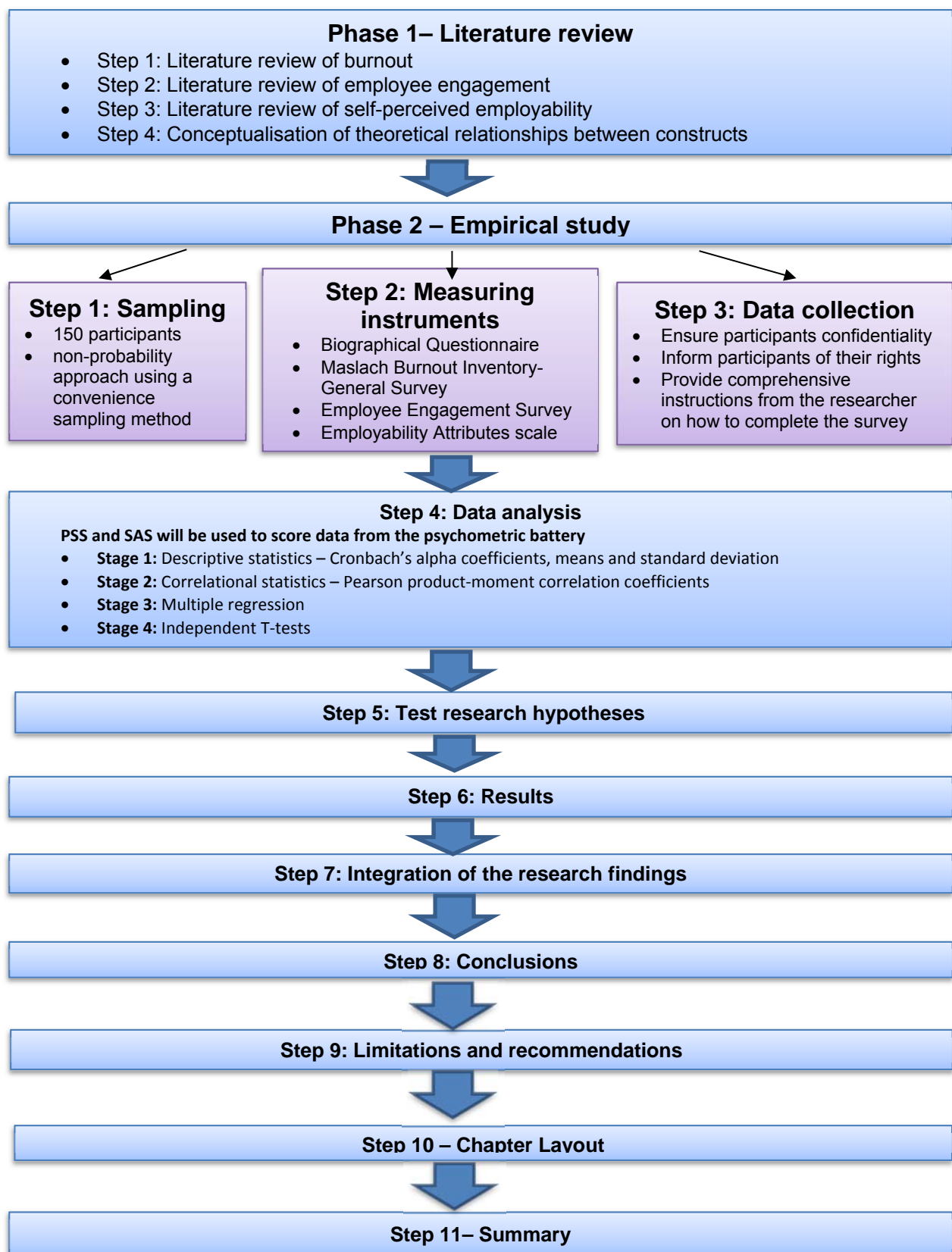
This research was guided by the ethical guidelines and principles stipulated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and approval by the Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa's (Unisa) Department of Industrial and Organisational Psychology. Ethics letter of approval as an **Appendix B**.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and with the informed consent of the participants. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality was maintained at all times. Participants were not asked to identify themselves. All data was kept secure and only the researcher had access to it.

#### **1.7. RESEARCH METHOD**

The research method consisted of a literature review, in which the variables were conceptualised; and an empirical study, which included selecting research participants, deciding on the measuring instruments, selecting the appropriate research procedure and carrying out a statistical analysis; and the last phase involved the interpretation of the results. This is illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.





**Figure 1.1: Flow diagram of the research method**

Adapted from Babbie and Mouton, 2009.

### **1.7.1. Phase 1: Literature review**

#### **Step 1: Literature review of burnout**

This involved the conceptualisation of the construct burnout among employees in a public sector organisation.

#### **Step 2: Literature review of employee engagement**

This involved the conceptualisation of the construct employee engagement among employees of the public sector organisation in a South African government department.

#### **Step 3: Literature review of self-perceived employability**

This involved the conceptualisation of the construct self-perceived employability among employees of the public sector organisation in a South African government department.

#### **Step 4: Conceptualisation of theoretical relationships**

The literature review focused on integrating the above literature to ascertain the theoretical relationships between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability, as manifested among the public sector organisations in a South African government department, and whether biographical factors such as gender, race and age influence employees' level of engagement and employability in the organisation.

### **1.7.2. Phase 2: Empirical study**

The empirical study is presented in the form of a research article in Chapter 3. The research article outlines the core focus of the study, the background to the study, trends from the research literature, the study's potential value added, the research design (research approach and research method), the results, a discussion of the results, the conclusions, the limitations of the study and recommendations for practice and future research. Chapter 4 integrates the research study and discusses the conclusions, limitations and recommendations in more detail. The empirical study included the following steps:

### Step 1: Determination and description of the sample

A population refers to the entire set of cases or individual elements from which a sample is drawn (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The population comprised South African public sector employees of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO).

This study adopted a non-probability approach using a convenience sampling method on the population. With convenience sampling, the “population elements are selected based on the fact that they are easily and conveniently available” (Maree, 2007, p. 177). It is a fast and less costly way of obtaining a sample; however, it may not result in a representative sample (Maree, 2007).

Public sector employees comprising the population were asked to voluntarily participate in the study. The study intended to obtain a sample  $n \geq 150$ .

### Step 2: Measuring instruments

The following questionnaires were used in the empirical study:

#### a) Biographical questionnaire

The biographic questionnaire was used to gather the biographical data of the participants such as age, gender, marital status, tenure and occupation. The questionnaire consisted of a set of multiple-choice options, where the respondents ticked the boxes pertaining to them.

#### b) The Maslach Burnout Inventory-General Survey

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-SS) instrument was used to measure burnout among the public sector employees. It consists of three subscales labelled emotional exhaustion (EE), cynicism (CY) and professional efficacy (PE).

#### c) The Employee Engagement Survey

Nienaber and Martins (2016) developed the employee engagement survey within the South African context. This instrument was used to measure employee engagement among the South African public sector employees (Nienaber & Martins, 2016).

d) The Employability Attributes Scale (EAS)

The EAS instrument, developed in 2010, was used to measure self-perceived employability (Bezuidenhout & Coetzee, 2010).

Step 3: Data collection

Each participant was informed of the nature of and reason for the study, confidentiality, ethical procedures and the voluntary nature of the study, together with a letter from the managing director of the organisation informing them of the benefits and value of the study for the organisation and encouraging participation.

The research participants were properly informed on the purpose of the study to ensure that they participated voluntarily, based on informed consent. An informed consent document, a biographical questionnaire and the MBI-HSS-20, Employee Engagement Scale and EAS instruments were provided, together with comprehensive instructions from the researcher on how to complete the survey. Data for the study were collected anonymously. The participants' confidentiality was guaranteed by minimising access of the number of people who see or use the data. Furthermore, the participants were not exposed to physical or psychological harm during the study.

Step 4: Data analysis

The data was collected from the questionnaires, captured electronically and transformed into a meaningful and usable format to conduct the statistical analysis.

The data was analysed using the SPSS Software program version 23.0. The following statistical analyses were computed using the SPSS program: descriptive and inferential statistics. To ensure the reliability of the measure, Cronbach's alpha coefficient (reliability analysis) was also computed.

Descriptive statistics was computed to describe the data in terms of sample composition and average scores on both the Maslach burnout inventory and the employee engagement survey, using frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Correlational analysis (as part of inferential statistics) was computed using the Pearson correlation ( $r$ ). This helped to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector.

#### Step 5: Hypotheses

The formulated research hypotheses were tested to achieve the objectives of the study.

#### Step 6: Results

Data analysis and findings were reported in the form of statistical tables and figures. Interpretations relevant to statistical analysis were utilised to make sense of the data.

#### Step 7: Integration of the research findings

The results of the empirical research were integrated into the findings of the literature review.

#### Step 8: Conclusions

Conclusions for the study were drawn in terms of the general objective and the specific theoretical and empirical objectives.

#### Step 9: Limitations and recommendations

Possible limitations of the study were identified and presented. Various limitations regarding the literature review, the research design, the sampling method, the sample size and characteristics were discussed. Recommendations for methodology, practice and future research were suggested.

#### Step 10: Chapter layout

Chapter 1 provides a scientific orientation to the research. Chapter 2 presents a literature review and Chapter 3 provides the research article. Finally, Chapter 4 presents the conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

### **1.8. CHAPTER LAYOUT**

The chapters of this dissertation are presented as set out below:

#### **1.8.1. Chapter 1: Scientific orientation to the research**

This chapter provides a scientific orientation to the research by discussing the background to and motivation for the research, the problem statement, the research

aims and research questions, the paradigm perspectives guiding the research and the research methods.

### **1.8.2. Chapter 2: Literature review**

The aim of this chapter is to present a theoretical background and conceptual analysis of the research variables, namely burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. This chapter gives a theoretical integration of how the variables are related and discusses practical implications.

### **1.8.3. Chapter 3: Research article**

This chapter describes the empirical study and the research methodology. An overview of the sample and population is presented. The measuring instruments are described with a motivation for the choice of each instrument. The data gathering and processing procedures are explained, and the statistical hypotheses also presented. The chapter concludes with a summary and integration of the research results.

### **1.8.4. Chapter 4: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations**

Conclusions are drawn in terms of the specific aims of the research and limitations are formulated in terms of the literature and empirical study. Finally, recommendations are made for future research.

## **1.9. SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the background to and motivation for the research, the problem statement, the research aims and the research questions. The chapter further explained the paradigm perspectives guiding the research. The research methods were then detailed. The chapter concluded by providing the layout for the chapters to follow.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The aim of this chapter is to present a theoretical background and conceptual analysis of the research variables, namely burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. This chapter gives a theoretical integration of how the variables are related and discusses practical implications.

#### **2.1. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF BURNOUT**

This section provides a description of burnout by focusing on the background, conceptual definition, theoretical conceptualisation, JD-R model, dimensions of burnout and the biographical variables influencing burnout.

##### **2.1.1. Background**

Experiences of burnout have become common among public sector institutions worldwide. The literature shows that employees in the public sector are faced with a myriad of burnout experiences (Guan, Xiaerfuding, Ning, Lian, Jiang, Liu, & Ng, 2017), such as feeling undervalued, chronic fatigue and feeling disconnected from the objectives of their public institutions (Bell & Bell, 2010; Palazzo et al., 2009).

The public sector literature indicates that efforts to improve quality of services are often reduced due to the lack of available resources to public sector employees (De Villiers & Hsiao, 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Fourie and Poggenpoel (2017) show that minimal resources in the public sector relate to lack of efficiency and effectiveness and to outputs not being achieved. Public sectors devote great effort to bringing about positive change; however, progress has remained slow and limited due to the limited amount of resources assigned to such efforts (Fourie & Poggenpoel, 2017).

South African public sector institutions deal with numerous concerns regarding the quality of service delivery amidst limited resources (Lehohla, 2016; Rothman, Jackson & Kruger, 2003). Subsequently, public sector employees in South Africa do experience symptoms of burnout. Most of the South African literature on burnout within the public sector context emanate from studies in relatively stressful work environments that are related to the human services such as the police, healthcare, and social welfare (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Contemporary researchers do

recognise that the burnout phenomenon in the public sector also occurs beyond the relatively stressful work environments (Rothmann, Jackson, & Kruger, 2003; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2009). The current study was conducted in a diplomatic work environment where the public sector employees perform their duties in an office setting (Brand-Labuschagne, Mostert, Rothmann, & Rothmann, 2012).

### **2.1.2. Defining burnout**

Burnout is a construct that has been acknowledged for over three decades. The term “burnout” was first introduced by Freudenberger (1974) to define a state of physical and emotional depletion resulting from the conditions of work. Most authors have defined burnout as the consequence of prolonged and extensive exposure to job-related stresses (Fragoso et al., 2016; Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2002; Tsigilis et al., 2006). Burnout exhibits a gradual onset relating to the employee experiencing it, and the level of work performance gradually deteriorates (Hunsaker, Chen, Maughan & Heaston, 2015). It is a condition associated with feelings of hopelessness and inability to perform the job (Hunsaker et al., 2015). It also affects the quality of the service delivered. Employees who are experiencing burnout are too exhausted to provide levels of quality service that will satisfy the public (Hunsaker et al., 2015).

This study adopted Maslach’s burnout definition, which refers to burnout as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). It is associated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among various professionals (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

### **2.1.3. Theoretical conceptualisation of burnout**

Burnout is viewed as a multi-dimensional stress syndrome consisting of mental and emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (Bakker et al., 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Burnout is also viewed as the opposite of engagement (Fourie, Rothmann, & Van de Vijver, 2007; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). Burnout scholars have proposed that the conceptual components of burnout, namely emotional exhaustion and cynicism, are respectively the conceptual opposites of engagement, namely vigour and dedication (González-Romá, Schaufeli, Bakker & Lloret, 2006; Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002).



Most researchers' associate burnout with feeling exhausted, feeling undervalued, absenteeism, high staff turnover, inability to perform at work and negative organisational results (Palazzo et al., 2012; Tsigilis et al., 2006; Schaufeli et al., 2008; West & West, 1989). Generally, the literature on burnout shows that employees in the public sector experience countless symptoms of burnout (Bell & Bell, 2010; Fourie & Poggenpoel, 2017) because of inadequate resources and an inability to meet their populations' needs (Fragoso et al., 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Van den Broeck et al., 2012).

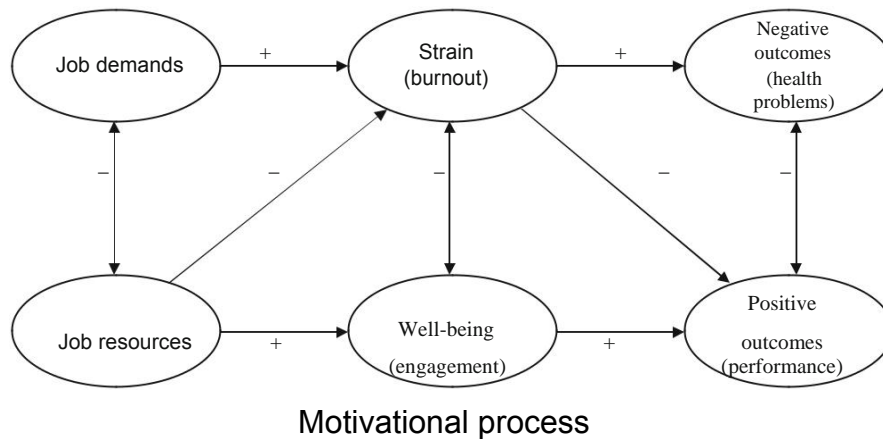
Research on burnout provided the impetus to the emergence of the construct 'engagement', especially during the mid-1990s when burnout scholars were promoting a move towards positive psychology, thus viewing burnout as the removal of one's positive mental state (Schaufeli et al., 2009). The flourishing of positive psychology in the new millennium reinforced the concept of engagement in the workplace as an approach to dealing with the issues of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

#### *2.1.3.1. Job Demand-Resources (JD-R) Model*

The JD-R model views burnout as the result of a demanding occupation and job-related resources (Fragoso et al., 2016). Job demands result in burnout symptoms because of a lack of resources (Kim et al., 2009). In contrast, job resources enhance a supportive work environment which boosts the reduction of burnout experiences (Kim et al., 2009). Basically, the JD-R model posits that job resources diminish the negative effects of job demands on exhaustion (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Schaufeli and Taris (2014) revised the traditional model of JD-R. They proposed that high job demands lead to strain or burnout and health impairment, and that high resources lead to increased motivation and higher productivity (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The revised model proposes that burnout is caused by high job demands and poor job resources, which will lead to health problems such as depression, cardiovascular disease, or psychosomatic complaints (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). In contrast, a motivational process is viewed as a result of abundant job resources (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Here, emphasis is on the inherently motivational qualities of job resources which counter burnout and health impairment (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

The below figure refers:



**Figure 2.1: Revised Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model**

Source: Schaufeli & Taris, 2014.

Public sector employees tend to experience symptoms of strain or burnout due to job demands which are not favourable and sometimes beyond their control, such as long hours, work–family conflict, and role ambiguity (Fragoso et al., 2016). Lack of job resources, which is a common factor in public sector institutions, can lead to higher risk of burnout (Fragoso et al., 2016). Job resources are related to motivational processes such as proactive work behaviours and effective service delivery outcomes (Fragoso et al., 2016).

#### 2.1.4. Dimensions of burnout

Burnout is commonly viewed as a multi-dimensional stress syndrome consisting of mental and emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment.

- **Emotional exhaustion:** refers to feeling overwhelmed and emotionally drained. Such employees are emotionally fatigued and are generally less enthusiastic about facing another day at work (Boonratana & Gharleghi, 2015).
- **Depersonalisation:** refers to withdrawing from others and becoming negative. Employees who encounter depersonalisation tend to withdraw from the job and are less concerned about their customers or work programmes (Boonratana & Gharleghi, 2015).

- **Personal accomplishment:** refers to the feeling of an individual's failure to achieve desired personal work outcomes. Such experiences may lead to diminished positive self-regard (Boonratana & Gharleghi, 2015).

### **2.1.5. Biographical variables influencing burnout**

This section investigated the relationship between burnout and the variables gender, age and tenure amongst employees in the public sector.

#### *2.1.5.1. Gender*

Various researchers reported inconsistent results of the relationship between gender and burnout. Some of them found that women are more susceptible to burnout than men (Krajewski & Goffin, 2005). Reports such as these are based on the notion that females are at higher risk of developing stress due to competing work culture and household responsibilities and therefore report higher levels of burnout than men (Shukla, Adhikari, & Singh, 2015).

However, some authors have found that women have lower burnout levels than men since women tend to apply better coping mechanisms to undesirable situations compared to men (Krajewski & Goffin, 2005). In addition, some authors found that there is no significant difference in burnout level of men and women (Shukla et al., 2015). For instance, in the public sector, research has shown the experience of men and women regarding burnout are similar in the case of emotional exhaustion (Attafar, Asl, & Shahin, 2011).

#### *2.1.5.2. Age*

Research findings on how burnout is influenced by age are contradictory. According to Bezuidenhout (2008), age and burnout are not significantly correlated, whilst Luk, Chan, Cheong, and Ko, (2010) show a significant relationship between age and exhaustion and depersonalisation. More research needs to be done about the variables age and burnout.

#### *2.1.5.3. Tenure*

The literature reports inconsistent findings in the correlation among years of work experience and burnout (Dimunová & Nagyová, 2012). A study by Blanchard et al.

(2010) found that the years of service and burnout are not related. In contrast, Dimunová and Nagyová (2012) established that nurses with more years of work experienced higher levels of burnout. The findings therefore show a significant relationship between burnout and the length of work experience.

Duli (2016) found similar results, which confirm the existence of a significant relationship between the years of work, emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation in the field of education. According to Duli (2016), employees who worked for a long time reported more exhaustion, more negative emotions toward their work and lower perceptions of success.

#### *2.1.5.4. Race*

Buys (2017) found that race did not have a significant impact on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. In addition, Buys (2017) found that the different racial groups do not differ significantly in terms of levels of depersonalisation. These results are consistent with findings by Bezuidenhout (2008), which showed no significant differences in terms of the relationship between burnout and racial groups such as Blacks and Whites.

#### *2.1.5.5. Qualification*

Previous research findings regarding the relationship between burnout and qualifications were contradictory. A study by Al-Bawaliz, Arbeyat, and Hamadneh (2015) indicated that there are no significant statistical differences between burnout and educational level (qualification). However, Luk et al. (2010) found that teachers who were better educated were consistently more burnt-out in emotional exhaustion and depersonalization.

## **2.2. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

This section provides a description of employee engagement by focusing on the background, conceptual definition, theoretical conceptualisation, and employee engagement in the South African context, focusing on dimensions of engagement and biographical variables influencing employee engagement.

### **2.2.1. Background**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, employee engagement is utilised in management practices as a managerial tool to achieve positive outcomes for both the individual and the organisation (Martins, 2015). Employee engagement is a useful tool to assist organisations to gain competitive advantage (Nienaber & Martins, 2014; Rajani & Joshua, 2016) and achieve optimal work performance (Nienaber & Martins, 2015). Employee engagement in the workplace is an approach that was originally used by private sector management to gain competitive advantage (Kosuta, 2010). However, numerous public sector institutions around the world are increasingly adopting the approach to obtain optimal work performance (Kosuta, 2010; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012).

Moreover, employee engagement is a tool that has been utilised by organisations to eradicate symptoms of burnout amongst their employees (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). The literature shows that the fostering of employee engagement in organisations including public sector institutions has also been driven by the need to reduce the issue of burnout (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). Conceptually, in this context, employee engagement is seen as a key element to approaching the challenges related to burnout (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). Public sector institutions have been utilising employee engagement as a mechanism to eradicate burnout (DPSA, 2013; DPSA, 2015). For instance, transformation programmes by the South African public sector to improve employee wellbeing include programmes to reduce burnout symptoms such as low morale among public servants, absenteeism, turnover and tardiness (Rajin, 2012).

Employee engagement has become an important approach in the modern business environment (Rajani & Joshua, 2016). It is associated with employees who are emotionally and intellectually engaged with the organisation, more attached to and committed to the organisation's goals and its values (Rajani & Joshua, 2016). Organisations also have a responsibility to provide a favourable organisational atmosphere for the successful performance of engaged employees (Rajani & Joshua, 2016) by promoting a healthy work environment (Nienaber & Martins, 2014). Research shows that over the past two decades organisations have been driven to provide a

healthy working environment to their employees to encourage them to be engaged (Rajani & Joshua, 2016).

### **2.2.2. Defining employee engagement**

Engagement seems to be a complex concept and has been used in various contexts; for instance, the context of employee engagement and the context of work engagement (Nienaber & Martins, 2014). While some scholars have used the two concepts interchangeably, others have argued that employee engagement and work engagement are two different concepts (Kahn, 1990; Nienaber & Martins, 2014). On the one hand, employee engagement is viewed as a broader concept than work engagement, because it includes both the occupational role of the employee as well as the employee's relationship with the organisation. On the other hand, work engagement refers to the (individual) employee's work (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

Earlier researchers such as Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as a "positive psychological state that consists of cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions" (p. 694). In this viewpoint, employees invest their physical, cognitive, and emotional energies in their work roles in a holistic and simultaneous fashion (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012).

Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined employee engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption. In this context engagement is viewed as the opposite of burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1998). Proponents of this view argue that the core dimensions of employee engagement, namely vigour and dedication, are the conceptual opposites of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, which are the core burnout dimensions (González-Romá et al., 2006; Leiter & Maslach, 1998).

Martins (2015) defines employee engagement as a psychological and motivational state which can be invested in one's preferred self. Nienaber and Martins (2015) define employee engagement as employees at both the individual and organisational level, "who are fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work, and thus take positive action to further the organization's reputation and interests". Martins (2015) refers to two types of employee engagement, namely job engagement and organisation engagement. These types are set against the background that individuals play multiple

roles within their everyday life and that workers typically perform their work role as well as their role as an organisational member (Martins, 2015, p. 758). In this case job engagement is the extent to which an individual is “psychologically present in their job role”.

Though the construct ‘employee engagement’ has voluminous definitions, all these definitions label employee engagement as an important and necessary tool for the effective functioning of an organisation (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Gruman & Saks, 2011). It is also clear that employee engagement is widely promoted to encourage employee wellbeing and organisational performance (Nienaber & Martins, 2015).

### **2.2.3. Theoretical conceptualisation of employee engagement**

The challenges placed by the 21st-century world of work require employees to have the potential to behave and perform in ways that lead to organisational success. This necessitates behavioural components such as commitment, involvement, attachment and psychological presence (Gupta & Sharma, 2016). According to Gupta and Sharma (2016), employee engagement is an integration of the above-mentioned separate behavioural components. Thus, engaged employees are happier, productive, provide better customer service, and are more competitive (Nienaber & Martins, 2015).

Employee engagement has been understood from the perspective of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Within this paradigm, engagement is conceptualised as a move in psychology from weaknesses and malfunctioning towards wellbeing and positive employee and organisational outcomes (Rothmann et al., 2003; Strümpfer, 2003; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

Employee engagement can be conceptualised at both the individual and organisational level(s) (Nienaber & Martins, 2015). According to Nienaber and Martins (2015, p. 405), “employee engagement refers to ‘engaged employees’ at both the individual and organisational level, who are fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work, and so take positive action to further the organisation’s reputation and interests”. Focusing on employee engagement from both the individual and

organisational perspectives can help organisations to improve their competitive advantage and organisational performance.

Engagement is viewed as a multidimensional concept. It comprises three distinct dimensions, namely energy, involvement, and efficacy (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Schaufeli et al., 2008). In the burnout literature (Maslach & Leiter, 1997), these three dimensions of engagement are seen as the direct opposite of the burnout dimensions, that is, exhaustion, cynicism and low professional efficacy, respectively (Bakker et al., 2008; Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; Du Plooy & Roodt, 2010). Proponents of engagement as the direct opposite of burnout see engagement as the best prevention strategy of burnout, and believe that people who are engaged with their work are better able to cope with the challenges they encounter, and are more likely to recover from stress (Maslach, 2011).

Khan (1990) sees engagement as the extension of the self. Kahn (1990) refers to varying degrees of 'self', namely physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Major recognitions of employee engagement have been made in the world; for example, high engagement is associated with higher productivity and effective service (Guest, 2016), job satisfaction, work wellbeing and more satisfied and loyal clients (Martins, 2015). It is against this background that academics and private and public sector institutions have been aiming to foster and manage employee engagement to achieve high levels of job success (Gruman & Saks, 2011).

In the context of the public sector, scholars have argued that focus on employee engagement could not only provide organisations with competitive advantage but also contribute towards a more functional public service (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). Many studies have shown that employee engagement ensures improved service in public sector organisations (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). Moreover, numerous scholars of engagement have pointed out that employee engagement is crucial for building modern public sectors and promoting the wellbeing of employees in government institutions (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012).

#### *2.2.3.1. Employee engagement model*

The employee engagement model was chosen in this study because it is relevant to the South African population. Employee engagement is associated with competitive

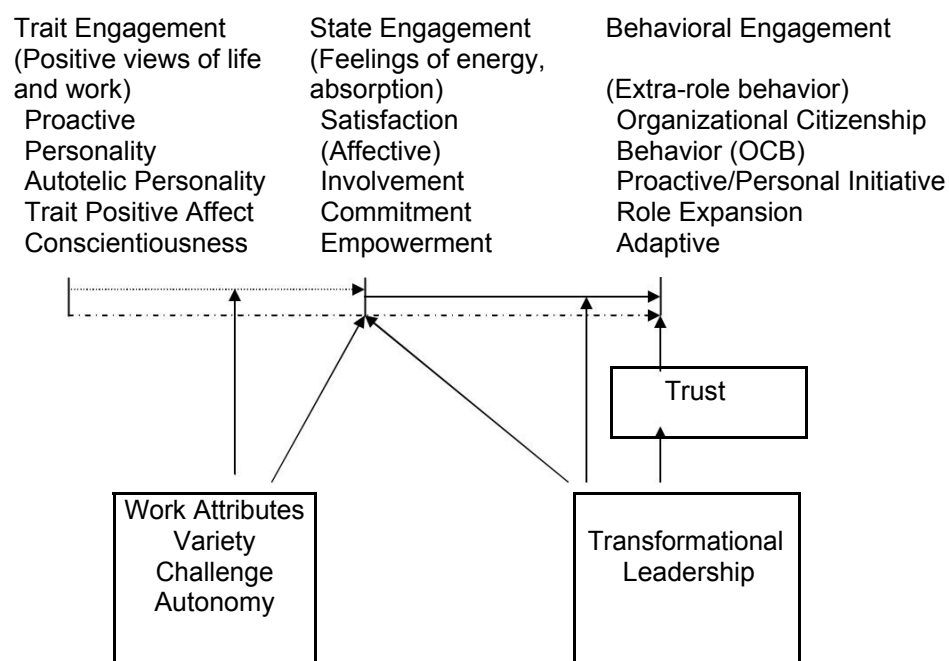


advantage and organisational performance (Nienaber & Martins, 2014). The model also refers to the relation that exists between the individual and the organisation. It highlights that the two are in relation to each other (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

The model differentiates between trait engagement, which is about attributes inherent in the person; state engagement, which is about feelings and affection; and lastly behaviour. The model comprises seven components that represent the individual, team/department and organisational levels of engagement (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

- The individual level taps into psychological trait, state and behavioural engagement;
- The team/departmental level comprises the components work, leadership and trust; and
- The organisational level is about organisational vision, mission, goals, purpose, strategy and competitive advantage to achieve organisational goals (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

The employee engagement model is depicted in Figure 2.2.



**Figure 2.2: Engagement model**

Source: Adapted from Macey & Schneider, 2008, p. 6.

#### **2.2.4. Employee engagement in the South African perspective**

Nienaber and Martins (2014) show that employee engagement levels in the world are relatively low, with only 13 percent of employees who are engaged. In South Africa, this figure is even lower than the global average, and it is only nine (9) percent. Findings by the Gallup organisation show that only a sample of nine percent of employees were actively engaged in South Africa, 38 percent were actively disengaged whilst 52 percent were said to be not engaged (Nienaber & Martins, 2014). The interpretation of these results indicated that nine percent of employees were psychologically committed to their jobs and likely to be making positive contributions to their organisations whilst most of the employees were not positive about their jobs and work environment (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

Kock and McNamara (2018) also conducted research on the levels of employee engagement within South African organisations. They conceptualised employee engagement as “a psychological state within which an employee connects and identifies with the personal, job and organisational dimensions of their work, resulting in retention and improved performance” (Kock & McNamara, 2018). They found that employee engagement within the context of South African organisations partially relates to the environment, and also depends on “the relationship between the person, the organisation and their job” (Kock & McNamara, 2018).

Employees’ feelings about how much their opinions count at work, and about their interactions with their supervisors are important in employee engagement. This is also based on a Gallup study which shows that leadership failings were highlighted in South Africa, with 67 percent of the staff surveyed indicating that they wanted their managers to lead and communicate better (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

#### **2.2.5. Dimensions of engagement**

According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2003), engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption. Engagement is therefore seen as an affirmative, satisfying mental state reflected by vigour, dedication, and absorption (Hakanen & Schaufeli, 2012; (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). These elements are briefly defined below.

- **Vigour:** is “characterised by high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one’s work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 188).
- **Dedication:** refers to “being strongly involved in one’s work, and experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 188).
- **Absorption:** is characterised by “being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 188).

#### **2.2.6. Biographical variables influencing employee engagement**

This section examines the relationship between employee engagement and variables such as gender, age and tenure amongst employees in the public sector.

##### *2.2.6.1. Gender*

Significant differences between genders and employee engagement were found by several studies. A study by Shukla et al. (2015) found that female employees were more engaged in their jobs as compared to their male counterparts. Findings by the Gallup’s US organisation show that women tend to find more fulfilment and satisfaction in their jobs and are more engaged than men (Shukla et al., 2015).

##### *2.2.6.2. Age*

According to Schaufeli and Bakker (2003), engaged employees tend to be much older than their younger counterparts. Results of an employee engagement survey show that 31 percent of South African employees younger than 30 years were not actively engaged in their jobs and were unsure about how they felt about their job and organisation (Kock & McNamara, 2018). In addition, respondents who frequently thought of quitting their jobs were mainly young African employees under the age of 30 (Kock & McNamara, 2018).

According to Shukla et al. (2015), age and work experience are related factors. Older individuals tend to be more engaged (Shukla et al., 2015). As a result, older workers are more engaged than younger workers when they work with a supportive supervisor in a supportive psychological climate (Shukla et al., 2015).

#### *2.2.6.3. Tenure*

Generally, employee engagement has been associated with job security; however, organisations can no longer guarantee life-time employment (Vanhercke, De Cuyper & De Witte, 2016). A study by Gallie (2016) indicates an increase in the growing number of engaged employees who have longer years of service. According to Shukla et al. (2015), employees with longer tenure tend to be more engaged.

#### *2.2.6.4. Race*

Bakken, Holzemer, Brown, Powell-Cope, Turner, Inouye and Corless (2000) and Salamonson, Andrew and Everett (2009) found no significant differences between employee engagement and different racial groups. Findings by Segal (2009) show that in the United States of America, Blacks and Indian (Native American) employees tend to be less engaged in their work compared to their White counterparts. There is a limitation of studies which investigated racial differences in relation to employee engagement in South Africa. In the South African literature, findings by Bezuidenhout (2008) show that there is no significant difference in the engagement of workers between Blacks and Whites. These findings differ from the results of a study conducted by Patel (2014), which focused on race and employee engagement in South African organisations. It shows that race has a significant influence on engagement amongst employees within South Africa (Patel, 2014).

#### *2.2.6.5. Qualification*

According to Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2006), employees with higher qualifications tend to be more engaged compared to those with relatively lower or no qualifications. The results are similar to those of Garg (2014), which depicted that employee engagement is maximum for graduate employees but it reduces as a graduate becomes postgraduate.

### **2.3. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF SELF-PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY**

This section provides a description of self-perceived employability by focusing on the background, conceptual definition, theoretical conceptualisation, employability model, the implication of self-perceived employability in the context of reducing burnout in the workplace as well as the biographical variables influencing self-perceived employability.

### **2.3.1. Background**

Studies in employability evolved in the 1990s as a tool to deal with job insecurity (Rothwell, Jewell, & Hardie, 2009), and the concept is often adopted by employers as an alternative to job security. Traditionally, it was argued that public sector employees experience less burnout than their private sector counterparts because of job security and other related concerns (Usman & Raja, 2013). This statement, however, can no longer hold true due to the evidence of changes in the psychological contract of the contemporary world of work (Coetzee et al., 2016). Focus has shifted away from job security to the individual ability to secure employment to survive in the turbulent working environment (Vanhercke et al., 2016).

In the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world of work, employees have to depend more on their own ability to secure employment in order to survive in the global economy (Vanhercke et al., 2016). This has set up an alternative to the issue of job security as individuals may be secure in the belief that their skills are not tied to a single employer but instead are transferable across organisations (Vanhercke et al., 2016). This is how the new psychological contract has placed emphasis on the employability of employees (Coetzee et al., 2016).

Research shows that even though many public sector employees in the South African government are offered job security, they still feel insecure about their occupational futures and uncertain about whether their desired career path can be sustained by the employer (Bosman, Rothmann, & Buitendach, 2005). The perception that most public sector employees hold about lack of growth, career path and development reduces well-being, thus resulting in employees feeling stressed and demotivated (Bosman et al., 2005).

According to Vanhercke et al. (2016), employability provides individuals with feelings of being in control of their careers and it enables them to pursue their own career goals (Vanhercke et al., 2016). Perceived employability can therefore be an effective tool for employees to survive in the global environment. According to Coetzee et al. (2016), in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century world of work, the way employees perceive themselves in terms of being in control of their work situation for securing their employment is integral to their coping mechanisms to survive in the global market.

The conceptualisation of perceived employability and employee engagement in terms of the purpose they serve in organisations tends to be similar. For instance, research has shown that an engaged employee perceives him/herself as being in control and perceives the workload as sustainable (Moodley, 2010). According to Coetzee et al. (2016), the way employees perceive themselves in terms of being in control of their work situation for securing their employment is integral to their coping mechanisms in the global market (Moodley, 2010).

### **2.3.2. Defining self-perceived employability**

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) referred to employability as the ability to use a set of skills, knowledge, understanding, and personal attributes to obtain satisfactory employment. Employability is also seen as the chance one has for getting employment in the internal and/or external labour market (Philippaers, De Cuyper, Forrier, Van der Elst, & De Witte, 2016; Vanhercke et al., 2016). It is the attractiveness of employees on the labour market, and ability of the employee to acquire marketable skills for maintaining employment security (Drange, Bernstrøm, & Mamelund, 2018).

Perceived employability is defined as the individual's perception of his or her chances of finding employment (Philippaers et al., 2016; Vanhercke et al., 2016) with the current employer or another organisation (Van der Vaart, 2012). Self-perceived employability is therefore concerned with the individuals' perceptions and beliefs about their possibilities to succeed in obtaining and maintaining desired employment (Qenani et al., 2014).

According to Coetzee et al. (2016), self-perceived employability refers to an individual's perception of his or her capabilities of obtaining and retaining fulfilling work, and having the knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes to move self-sufficiently within the labour market.

### **2.3.3. Theoretical conceptualisation of self-perceived employability**

Self-perceived employability is viewed as a multidimensional (Rothwell et al., 2009) psycho-social construct (Coetzee et al., 2016; Qenani et al., 2014). It has both subjective and objective elements, and therefore can be studied from an individual's perspective as well as an organisational perspective (Qenani et al., 2014). The literature correlates education, job-related skills and employer support and

competence development with self-perceived employability (Drange et al., 2018). Drange et al. (2018) referred to the antecedents of self-perceived employability as a job–skills match and the employer’s support for competence development.

According to Rothwell et al. (2009), employability can be viewed from the field of human resource management and psychology as the individual’s ability to retain or obtain employment based on acquired skills and personal flexibility through employment. Emphasis of this view is placed on the individuals’ perceptions of their ability to their employment (Rothwell et al., 2009).

Generally, individuals’ decision making is largely based on their level of self-perception as opposed to what is objectively true of their actual abilities (Qenani et al., 2014). As a result, the individuals’ self-perception is often the reason they feel and behave in certain ways compared to their actual capabilities of accomplishing a task (Qenani et al., 2014).

Employability is seen as a psychosocial construct that enhances the suitability of an individual for employment (Coetzee, Oosthuizen, & Stoltz, 2015). It is attributed to career management skills, self-directed behaviour, personal initiative and openness to change (Coetzee et al., 2015). Employees in this context are proactive, take accountability for their decisions and continuously improve their knowledge and skills (Coetzee et al., 2015).

Self-perceived employability is important for employee wellbeing. The perception that people hold about themselves regarding their ability to make a difference is very important. Research shows that individuals who perceive themselves favourably are happier and can easily convince others about their qualities and capabilities even if this is not accurate (Qenani et al., 2014). Such a perception helps to motivate individuals to take up projects, to adjust, and thrive despite various hindrances (Qenani et al., 2014). Self-perceptions also impact an individual’s feelings, health, emotions, and happiness throughout life (Qenani et al., 2014). This makes self-perceptions of employability vital for employees and people seeking employment in the labour market (Qenani et al., 2014).

According to Qenani et al. (2014), when individuals perceive themselves as employable, they associate with “feelings of security and independence, motivation,

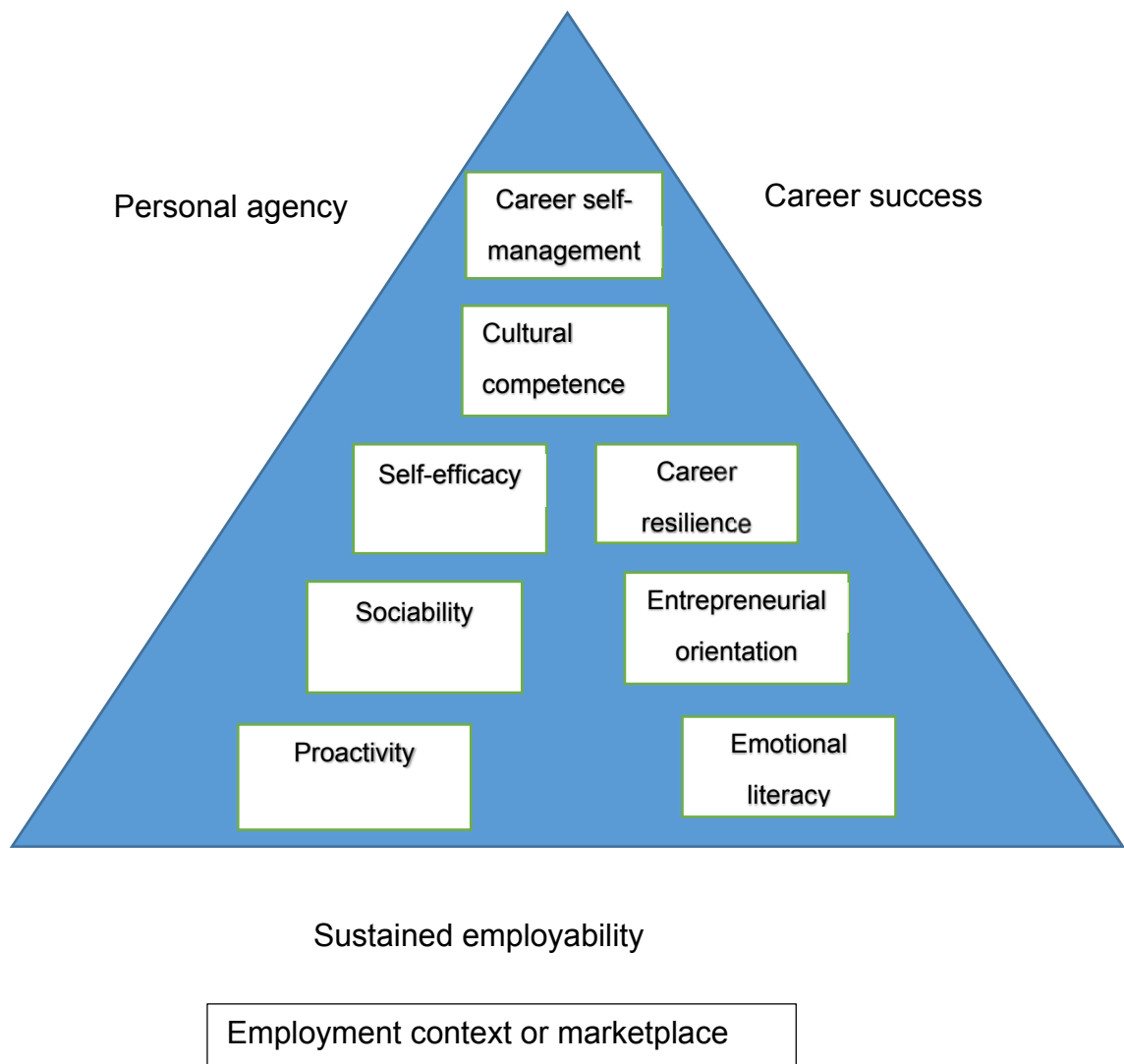
and behaviours that can lead to effective negotiations, better job performance, and resilience to adversity, more successful careers, and better health and life satisfaction”.

#### *2.3.3.1. Self-perceived employability model*

Bezuidenhout and Coetzee (2010) developed a self-perceived employability model for adult learners which explains the following eight essential employability attributes: (1) career self-management; (2) cultural competence; (3) self-efficacy; (4) career resilience; (5) sociability; (6) entrepreneurial orientation; (7) proactivity, and (8) emotional literacy (Bezuidenhout & Coetzee, 2010).

These attributes maximise one’s employability (Coetzee et al., 2015). For instance, self-efficacy, sociability, proactivity, emotional literacy and entrepreneurial orientation essentially stimulate proactive adaptability in unstable environments and enhance a person’s suitability for employment (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013). Career self-management helps to motivate individuals to improve their employability by improving their marketable skills and helping them to build professional networks (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013). In addition, these attributes have been positively related to employee engagement and commitment (Coetzee et al., 2015).





**Figure 2.3: Conceptual overview of the skills and attributes that underlie people's employability**

Source: Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013.

The employability attributes are explained below (Coetzee et al., 2015; Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013):

- **Career self-management** refers to the individual's confidence to continuously develop his or her career in pursuit of his or her career goals. It is about the individual's ability to show understanding of his or her career aspirations and develop clarity about his or her career objectives and needs to obtain career success;
- **Cultural competence** refers to the possession of the reflexive thinking skills that enable adult learners to work cooperatively and without difficulty in diverse cultural settings;
- **Self-efficacy** is about one's independence and the ability to easily make own decisions, to confidently achieve through one's own work;
- **Career resilience** is about one's ability to be flexible in unstable situations. This happens when an individual is not resistant to job and organisational changes; instead, more open to change and has self-confidence in dealing successfully with such changes;
- **Sociability** is about one's ability to create social interactions with people who are resourceful in terms of providing more employment opportunities;
- **Entrepreneurial orientation** is about being innovative and continuously creative in the workplace;
- **Proactivity** is about showing initiative and actively engaging in initiated self-improvement activities. It is also about one's ability to advance his or her skills and knowledge in order to ensure career progress;
- **Emotional literacy** relates to an individual's ability to correctly understand, interpret and manage his or her emotions and those of others (Coetzee et al., 2015; Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013).

#### **2.3.4. Implication of self-perceived employability in the context of reducing burnout in the workplace**

Self-perceived employability as a key personal resource (Lu, Sun, & Du, 2016) is attributed to an intrinsic self-regulatory tool which enables individuals to cognitively adjust their goals and behaviours in a manner that enhances person–environment alignment (Coetzee et al., 2015). It enables employees to be proactive, accountable

for their decisions, and to continuously advance their knowledge and skills for career progression (Coetzee et al., 2015).

Self-perceived employability therefore provides individuals with feelings of being in control over their careers and drives individuals to pursue their career goals (Qenani et al., 2014). According to Lu et al. (2016), high employability can protect individuals from a stressful work environment. Employees who continuously struggle to advance their employability skills over time, and self-perceive low employability as a result, are likely to associate with reduced personal accomplishment, feelings of stress and eventually burnout (De Cuyper, Raeder, Van der Heijden, & Wittekind, 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

Research has pointed workforce trends to a scarcity of highly skilled employees (Coetzee et al., 2015). In the context of self-perceived employability as outputs that are associated with the likelihood of getting and retaining a job, employees are faced with high demands to get and retain a job in such a workforce (De Cuyper et al., 2012). On the part of employees, this necessitates continuous effort, which could lead to energy depletion and ultimately to burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012).

Self-perceived employability is largely associated with the positive effect of well-being (Qenani et al., 2014). The literature also associates the opposite of well-being with work-related mental illnesses such as burnout (Qenani et al., 2014). Recent studies are consistently showing the negative relationship between self-perceived employability and burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). The empirical evidence from worldwide studies supports the idea that employees who possess more personal resources, for instance self-perceived employability, experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). Lu et al. (2016) proved that employability is a vital personal resource in the current turbulent working environment because it can improve individuals' ability to cope with job or career changes (Lu et al., 2016).

### **2.3.5. Biographical variables influencing self-perceived employability**

This section explores the relationship between self-perceived employability and the socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, tenure and race.

#### *2.3.5.1. Gender*

Findings on the relationship between gender and self-perceived employability are inconsistent. Qenani et al. (2014) found that females are 50 percent less likely to consider themselves employable compared to men. These findings were congruent with findings of a study by Vargas, Sánchez-Queija, Rothwell, and Parra (2018) conducted in Spain, which found that men scored higher than women in a self-perceived employability scale. However, Rothwell et al. (2009) found that there are no significant differences between the scores for males and females for self-perceived employability. These findings were confirmed by Karli (2016), who reported that gender did not make any significant difference to the employability perceptions of the participants.

#### *2.3.5.2. Age*

Karli (2016) found that senior students had significantly higher employability perceptions compared to junior students (Karli, 2016). A study by Oosthuizen, Coetzee, and Mntonintshi (2014) found that employees of different age groups did not differ significantly regarding their employability attributes.

#### *2.3.5.3. Tenure*

In the context of boundaryless careers, self-perceived employability is seen as a tool to facilitate turnover or mobility because employees who are employable have more job opportunities in the labour market (Lu et al., 2016). Employees who perceive themselves as employable are confident about their capabilities of securing employment (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2015). They are less likely to leave their organisations because they believe that the career opportunities offered suit their career plans and goals.

#### *2.3.5.4. Race*

According to Rothwell et al. (2009), the findings regarding the influence of race on employability are contradictory. Some researchers have confirmed the significant influence that race has on self-perceived employability, whilst others have confirmed the non-significance of race on self-perceived employability. For instance, Oosthuizen et al. (2014) found that race did not significantly affect employees regarding their employability attributes. Potgieter and Coetzee (2013) found no significant

relationships between race and employability. In addition, Koloba (2015) found that there are no significant differences between Blacks and Whites and perceived employability, except on knowledge and skills. In contrast, Qenani et al. (2014) indicated that race is an individual factor of considerable influence on self-perceived employability.

#### *2.3.5.5. Qualification*

Some researchers do not support the notion that employability positively correlates with academic qualifications. For instance, Lourens and Fourie-Malherbe (2016) argue that becoming an employable graduate is more than simply obtaining a degree, but rather a process of developing a 'graduate identity' that is presented to prospective employers by graduate job-seekers. Fallows and Steven (2000) also supported that employability skills are more than the education qualifications obtained at academic institutions, and thus do not guarantee the employability of graduates.

## **2.4. THEORETICAL INTEGRATION OF BURNOUT, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY**

The theoretical integration of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability comprise the definitions of each construct, the theoretical relationships between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the public sector, as well as variables influencing burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

### **2.4.1. Theoretical definitions of constructs**

#### *2.4.1.1. Burnout*

Burnout exhibits a gradual onset so that there is a gradual deterioration in the work of the employee experiencing it (Hunsaker et al., 2015). It is a condition associated with feelings of hopelessness and inability to perform the job (Hunsaker et al., 2015). Employees who are experiencing burnout are too exhausted to provide levels of quality service that would satisfy the public (Hunsaker et al., 2015). It is a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). It is associated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among various professionals (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

#### *2.4.1.2. Employee engagement*

Martins (2015) defines employee engagement as a psychological and motivational state which can be invested in one's preferred self. Employee engagement can be viewed at both the individual and organisational level, and refers to employees who are "fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work, and so take positive action to further the organisation's reputation and interests" (Nienaber & Martins, 2016). Employee engagement is an important and necessary tool for the effective functioning of an organisation (Harter et al., 2002; Gruman & Saks, 2011). It is also viewed as the opposite of burnout (González-Romá et al., 2006; Leiter & Maslach, 1998), and therefore utilised by organisations as a mechanism to eradicate burnout amongst employees (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012).

#### *2.4.1.3. Self-perceived employability*

Self-perceived employability refers to an individual's perception of his or her capabilities of obtaining, and retaining fulfilling work, and having the knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes to move self-sufficiently within the labour market (Coetzee et al., 2016).

### **2.4.2. Theoretical relationships between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the public sector**

The focus of the literature review was on investigating the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

Literature about the relationship between the three variables reflects a negative relationship between employee engagement and burnout, and a negative relationship between self-perceived employability and burnout. For instance, individuals/employees who perceive themselves as employable tend to be in control of their careers, growth, and development, while employers also have a role of supporting their efforts (Lu et al., 2016). Engaged employees also tend to be in control of their work situation and are actively involved and productive, but employers also have a role of supporting their efforts (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

In both the contexts of self-perceived employability and employee engagement, employees who are not in control of their work situations are likely to associate with

reduced personal accomplishment, feelings of stress and eventually burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). In contrast, individuals/ employees who perceive themselves as employable can protect themselves from a stressful work environment (Lu et al., 2016). Similarly, engaged employees perceive the workload as sustainable and resilient, which enables them to prevent stressful situations (Moodley, 2010).

There is a lack of studies which have demonstrated the relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Perception of meaningfulness is a key predictor of self-perceived employability (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2012). When employees perceive work as meaningful, it results in eustress, which promotes engagement (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2012). Meaningfulness in terms of the job role can also be seen as a predictor of employee engagement (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). When employees find meaning in their job roles and understand how it fits with the organisation they become more engaged (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). A sense of dedication was also found to be a significant predictor of self-perceived employability (Coetzee & Oosthuizen, 2012). Dedication is a core component of engagement. So, both meaningfulness and dedication are positively related to employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

#### **2.4.3. Variables influencing burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability**

The literature review provided insight into how biographical groups might differ in respect of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

##### ***2.4.3.1. Variables influencing burnout***

According to Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001), personality traits such as low self-esteem or confidence, failure to recognise personal limits, need of approval, overachieving, need for autonomy, impatience, intolerance, and empathy increased susceptibility to burnout. A positive correlation has been determined between personality traits with the risk of developing burnout.

Another variable which has an influence on burnout is workload. Maslach et al. (2001) relate workload to exhaustion. A too heavy workload or rather high job demands can deplete the energy of workers and are associated with high levels of emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001).

Maslach et al. (2001) also identified a sense of control as another variable which has an influence on burnout. Individuals' lack of sense of control over their jobs leads to poor work performance and experiences of symptoms of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

#### *2.4.3.2. Variables influencing employee engagement*

Numerous factors have been identified by previous researches that influence employee engagement. Team work and collaboration, leadership and job role have been found to have significant influence on employee engagement (Mansoor & Hassan, 2016). Research by Mansoor and Hassan (2016) found the following:

- Team work and collaboration: give employees the family feel, and they focus on a common goal, which increases employee engagement.
- Job role: when employees see how their role fits into the organisational goals they become more encouraged and actively involved.
- Leadership or company management: when top management effectively communicates the organisational goals and what is needed of them, employee engagement increases.

Personality is another important factor in influencing employee engagement (Shukla et al., 2015). Shukla et al. (2015) found that the Big Five personality factors (extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience) have an impact on employee engagement.

#### *2.4.3.3. Variables influencing self-perceived employability*

Potgieter and Coetzee (2013) show that personality attributes such as career self-management, career resilience and cultural competence have influence on people's ability to sustain their employability.

Rothwell et al. (2009) identified the following factors influencing self-perceived employability, namely the external labour market's demand for people in the same field, level of confidence in one's own skills and abilities, the status and credibility of the individual field of study, and the person's level of engagement with his or her work.



Qenani et al. (2014) identified work experience and self-managed career behaviour as the two key influential factors of self-perceived employability. Individuals with self-managing behaviour tend to have increased perceptions of self-perceived employability and hence an increased likelihood of more opportunities of employment (Qenani et al., 2014).

Perceptions of meaningfulness and dedication were found to be key factors of self-perceived employability. The findings of Coetzee and Oosthuizen (2012) show that students' perceptions of the meaningfulness of and dedication to their studies significantly predicted their self-perceived employability.

People's personality preferences are key factors influencing self-perceived employability (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013). These need to be considered when developing the employability attributes of individuals to sustain their employability in a changing environment (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013).

#### **2.4.4. Implications for industrial psychology and public sector institutions**

This study contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of industrial psychology by highlighting whether self-perceived employability is related to employee engagement or are independent constructs in the context of reducing burnout. Burnout involves feelings of reduced accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), while both employee engagement and self-perceived employability are found to increase employees' sense of control over their work/careers and hinder unfavourable feelings, particularly burnout (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Moodley, 2010; Qiao, Xia, & Li, 2016; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007). Studies have shown that burnout is detrimental to the wellbeing of employees and can result in financial implications for organisations, including public sector institutions (Buys, 2017). Therefore, this research could assist public sector institutions to understand the essential tools or mechanisms to combat burnout and its symptoms.

On the one hand, self-perceived employability is a positive psychosocial resource which relieves symptoms of burnout (Qiao et al., 2016). It is also seen as a potential functional mechanism such that employees who perceive themselves as highly employable possess high adaptability skills, are in control of work situations and careers and are more motivated in terms of their careers and personality (Coetzee et

al., 2016; Qiao et al., 2016). On the other hand, employee engagement is also a mechanism that has been utilised by organisations, including public sector institutions, to reduce burnout amongst employees (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007; Gupta & Sharma, 2016). Public sector institutions may benefit from the findings of this study on the additional mechanisms to reduce burnout amongst employees. According to Qiao et al. (2016), self-perceived employability attributes facilitate competence by helping employees suffering from burnout to accomplish difficult tasks effectively, thus reducing their risk of developing psychological disorders.

## **2.5. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Theoretically, there are significant relationships among burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. This chapter reviewed literature about the existence of any significant relationships between these variables. Theory has demonstrated significant correlations among burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. On the one hand, burnout and employee engagement have a strong negative relationship. On the other, burnout and self-perceived employability also have a strong negative relationship. Self-perceived employability and employee engagement are positively related.

The following research aims of the literature review were achieved:

- Conceptualise burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees from a theoretical perspective.
- Conceptualise the theoretical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees in the literature.
- Determine the role played by biographical variables (age, gender, tenure and race) on burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees.
- Formulate recommendations for industrial psychology practices and future research.

Chapter 3 presents the empirical research aims and discusses the empirical findings of the research. This discussion is in the form of a research article.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BURNOUT, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-PERCEIVED EMPLOYABILITY AMONGST EMPLOYEES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SECTOR

##### ABSTRACT

**Orientation:** The employee engagement approach has been utilised to combat burnout in both private and public sector institutions. With increasing research, self-perceived employability is gaining popularity as an effective tool for reducing burnout in the contemporary world of work. Knowledge of the relationship between these three constructs is therefore important for public sector institutions and researchers in industrial and organisational psychology in South Africa.

**Research Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector.

**Motivation for Study:** Numerous studies have highlighted the prevalence of poor service delivery in public sector institutions as linked to employees feeling disconnected from their work as a result of numerous burnout symptoms. Numerous studies have emphasised the significance of employee engagement for reducing burnout. With increasing research, focus has also been on the employability construct as a tool to manage burnout in the ever-changing nature of the working environment and the labour market. Both employee engagement and self-perceived employability have been utilised as approaches to reduce burnout amongst employees. However, the relationship between these three constructs is unknown, and therefore the findings of this study will be crucial for both public sector institutions and researchers in industrial and organisational psychology in South Africa.

**Research Design, Approach and Method:** The researcher conducted a quantitative study. It involved a non-probability sample of 158 South African public sector employees. Correlational and descriptive statistical analyses were utilised to analyse the data.

**Main Findings:** Burnout has a significant negative relationship with employee engagement; however, burnout does not significantly correlate with self-perceived employability. There are significant differences between the various biographical groups and burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

**Practical/Managerial Implications:** Approaches to reducing burnout amongst employees should consider employee engagement and self-perceived employability as effective tools to enhance employees' wellness, morale and improved service delivery. Improving the engagement levels of employees and enhancing their employability will greatly improve the well-being of employees in public sector institutions and help alleviate the actual employee burnout.

**Keywords:** burnout, employee engagement, self-perceived employability, public sector, non-human services sector

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this article, thorough background and current literature relevant to the study is provided. The research design, research methodology and results are also discussed. In addition, recommendations and the potential value-add by the study are provided to conclude the article.

#### **3.1.1. Key focus of the study**

The focus of this study is on the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. This is against the background that there are no studies that investigated the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector.

#### **3.1.2. Background to the study**

Public sector workers in the contemporary global economy are faced with a myriad of psychosocial stressors due to high job demands (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014) as well as changes in the psychological contract in the contemporary world of work (Coetzee et al., 2016). Public sector organisations in the world, including South Africa, are constantly promoting employee health and overall employee commitment (Usman & Raja, 2013) for purposes of achieving service delivery. However, research shows that public sector employees are increasingly experiencing numerous stressors and

various levels of burnout (Golembiewski, Boudreau, Sun, & Luo, 1998; Palazzo, Aerts, & Carlotto, 2013).

With increasing research, several approaches on combating such experiences of burnout have been realised in the world of work, and this study focused on two of these approaches, namely employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Traditionally, engagement has been utilised as a tool to reduce burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Employee engagement, for instance, has been utilised to achieve competitive advantage for both individuals and organisations (Nienaber & Martins, 2015). Even with such measures in place to combat the experiences of burnout amongst employees, research still indicates the countless symptoms of burnout experiences among public sector employees due to changes within the global economy (Guan et al., 2017), such as changes in psychological contracts in the contemporary world of work (Coetzee et al., 2016). In this context, individuals focus on increasing their employability by taking charge of their careers to survive in the global economy. Public sector employees in developing countries like South Africa tend to be perceived with lack of growth and career path (Bosman et al., 2005), thus resulting in employees feeling frustrated, stressed and ultimately demotivated (Vanhercke et al., 2016). It is therefore prudent to investigate the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability within the South African public sector.

A considerable volume of existing research studies regarding the relationship between burnout and engagement within the South African public sector has been noted by the current study. Most of this literature emanates from studies in relatively stressful work environments that are related to human services such as the police, healthcare, and social welfare (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Studies conducted in the South African context that focus on burnout beyond the human services occupations such as managers and white-collar employees are very limited. The current study focuses on a South African public sector institution which has a core mandate beyond the human services occupations.

### **3.1.3. Trends in the research literature**

This section provides the current trends in the research literature of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

### *3.1.3.1. Burnout*

Burnout is a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). It is associated with emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among various professionals (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Research has shown that public sector employees in South Africa do experience symptoms of burnout (Lehohla, 2016). Several factors that contribute to burnout have been identified, namely personality factors such as low self-esteem or confidence (Maslach et al., 2001) and other factors such as a high workload and lack of resources (De Villiers & Hsiao, 2017; Schaufeli et al., 2009).

Public sector employees in the South African government tend to be affected by these factors, making them susceptible to burnout. For instance, research shows that they tend to feel uncertain about issues of growth and career path in their employment (Bosman et al., 2005). They also tend to experience symptoms of strain or burnout due to high job demands and lack of job resources (Fragoso et al., 2016). With increasing research during the 1990s, scholars introduced a shift away from the focus of burnout and its antecedents towards a flourishing positive psychology view (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Interest arose from this view to focus on engagement as a strategy to deal with the issues of burnout (Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010).

### *3.1.3.2. Employee engagement*

The engagement construct is broad and can be divided into inter alia employee engagement, work engagement and personal engagement. This study focused on employee engagement, which is defined in the context of both the individual and organisational level, as enthusiasm about work and taking positive action to further the organisation's reputation and interests (Nienaber & Martins, 2015). Employee engagement is associated with employees who are emotionally and intellectually engaged with the organisation, more attached to and committed to the organisation's goals and its values (Rajani & Joshua, 2016).

Employee engagement is utilised in organisations and or public sector institutions as a mechanism or approach to attain positive outcomes for both the individual and the organisation (Martins, 2015). Numerous institutions have adopted this approach to

combat issues of burnout and achieve optimal work performance (Kosuta, 2010; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). In South African public sector institutions, for instance, the employee engagement approach has been utilised to eradicate burnout (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). However, the literature indicates that public sector employees are still faced with a myriad of burnout experiences (Guan et al., 2017). These experiences include feeling unvalued, chronic fatigue and feeling disconnected from the objectives of their public institutions (Bell & Bell, 2010). Researchers have explored other interventions of dealing with burnout issues such as employability, perceived employability and self-perceived employability (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016; Qenani et al., 2014).

### *3.1.3.3. Self-perceived employability*

Self-perceived employability refers to an individual's perception of his or her capabilities of obtaining and retaining fulfilling work, and having the knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes to move self-sufficiently within the labour market (Coetzee et al., 2016). It is associated with the individual's own perception of being employable, in control over careers and being independent. Subsequently, it may result in improved job performance, resilience, successful careers, as well as better health and life satisfaction (Qenani et al., 2014). Individuals who perceive themselves as employable tend to be proactive, accountable and to continuously advance their knowledge and skills for career progression (Coetzee et al., 2015).

Recent studies have found evidence of the negative relationship between burnout and self-perceived employability (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). The trend is that individuals who self-perceive the inability to advance their employability skills over time are likely to continuously feel stressed and eventually burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). Self-perceived employability in this instance is therefore seen as an internal resource that can protect individuals from stressful work environments (Lu et al., 2016).

There has been no investigation into the relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability, or the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. The empirical findings may cast light on the said relationship. The following research hypotheses were empirically tested:

- Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst the South African public sector employees.
- Hypothesis 2: South African public sector employees differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability according to their demographic variables (age, gender, tenure, race and qualifications).
- Hypothesis 3: There is a statistically significant negative relationship between employee engagement and burnout amongst public sector employees.
- Hypothesis 4: There is a statistically significant negative relationship between self-perceived employability and burnout amongst public sector employees.
- Hypothesis 5: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in a sample of the South African public sector employees.

#### **3.1.4. Research objectives**

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector. This research objective was divided into four research aims:

- To determine the empirical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in a sample of South African public sector employees.
- To determine whether employee engagement and self-perceived employability negatively relate with burnout amongst South African public sector employees.
- To determine whether the South African public sector employees from the various demographic groups (age, gender, race, marital status and tenure) differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.
- To formulate recommendations for industrial psychology practices and future research, based on the literature and empirical findings of this research regarding burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the public sector.



### **3.1.5. The potential value-add of the study**

The employee engagement approach has been utilised to combat burnout in both private and public sector institutions (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). With increasing research, self-perceived employability is gaining popularity as an effective tool to reduce burnout in the contemporary world of work (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). Knowledge of the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability is therefore important for public sector institutions and researchers in industrial/organisational psychology in South Africa.

This study adds to the body of research and knowledge of industrial and organisational psychologists and public sector institutions in conceptualising the factors moderating burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Knowledge of the nature and relationships between these constructs will enable industrial and organisational psychologists to provide valuable information and insight, diagnose and solve problems to improve well-being of employees, work performance and reduce burnout and its symptoms.

## **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design is discussed in terms of the research approach and the research method. It comprised research participants, measuring instruments, research procedure and ethical considerations and the statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were computed to describe relationships between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector.

### **3.2.1. Research approach**

This study adopted a quantitative approach, using a survey design. Three key variables were identified for this study, namely public sector employees' experience of burnout, employee engagement and perceived employability. The empirical relationship between these constructs was investigated by means of correlational statistical analysis, using the Pearson correlation ( $r$ ). All instruments utilised were standardised instruments and the sample was representative.

### 3.2.2. Research method

The discussion with respect to the research method includes the population of the study, the measuring instruments utilised, the research procedure and ethical considerations, as well as the statistical analysis.

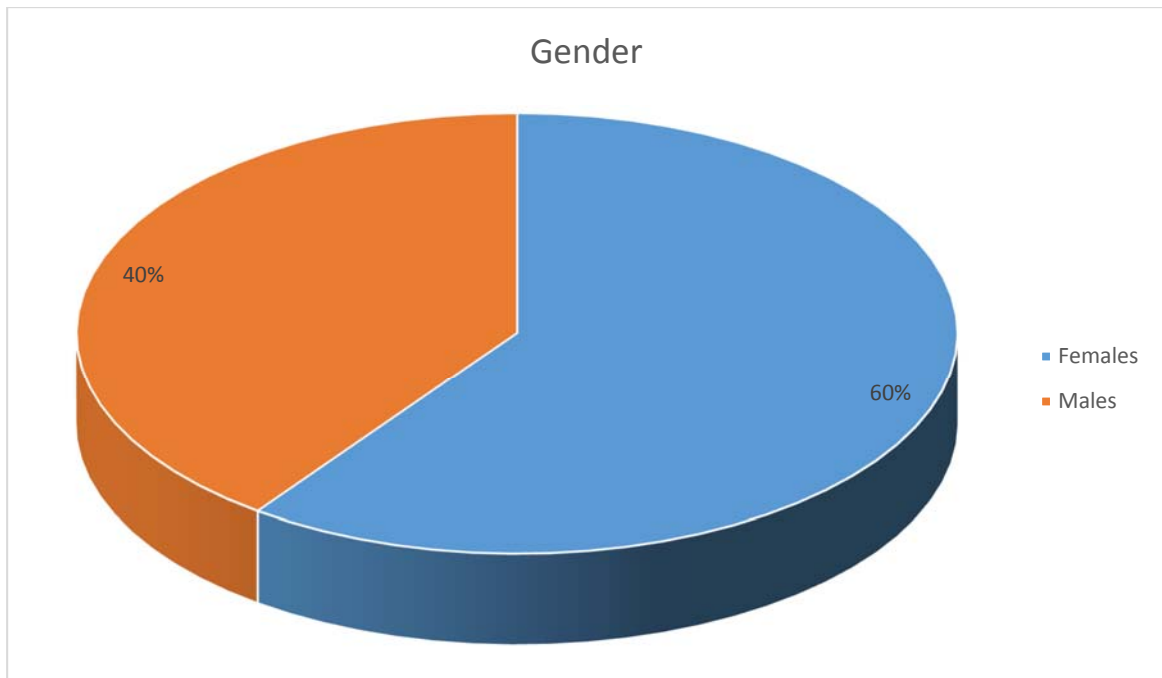
#### 3.2.2.1. Research participants

The sample of the study consisted of 158 participants. The population constituted permanently employed, public sector employees in a non-human services government institution. A non-probability approach, using a convenience sampling method, was applied. Questionnaires were hand delivered to participants for completion in their offices and they were given ample time to complete. Table 3.1 represents descriptive information of the sample.

**Table 3.1: Biographical distribution of sample (N = 158)**

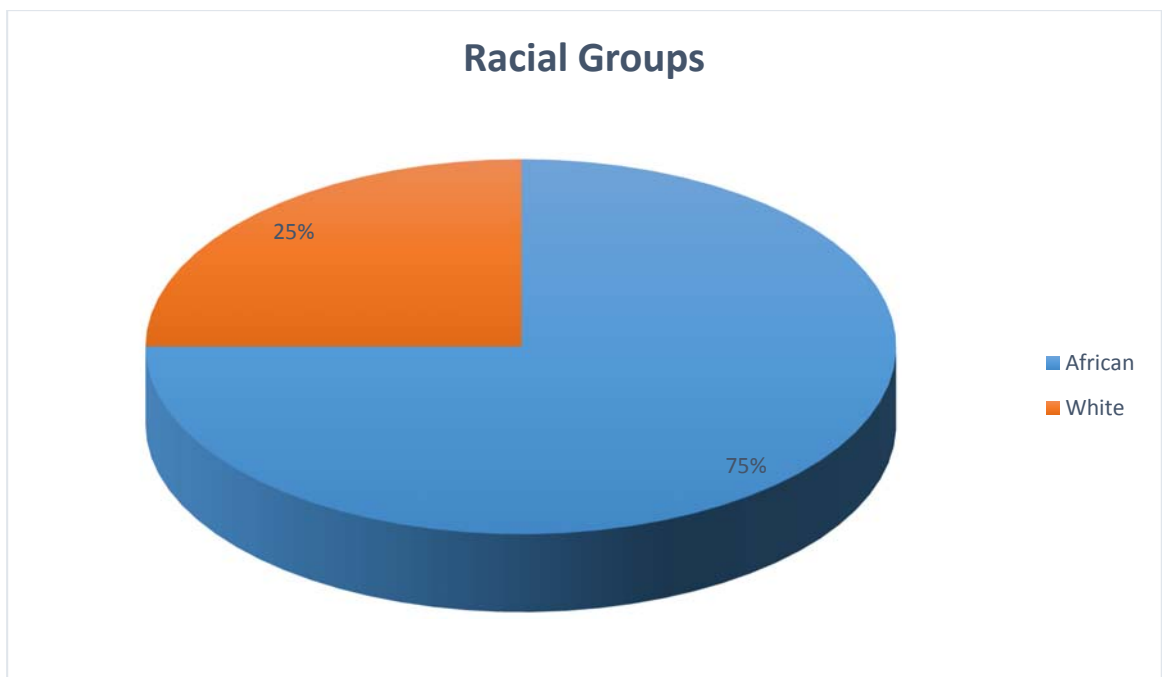
Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Females	94	59.49
	Males	64	40.51
<b>Race</b>	Black	119	75.32
	White	39	24.68
<b>Marital Status</b>	Not married	71	44.93
	Married	87	55.06
<b>Qualification</b>	Matric	15	9.5
	Undergraduate	92	58.2
	Postgraduate	51	32.3
<b>Age</b>	35 yrs and younger	42	26.6
	Older than 35 yrs	116	73.4
<b>Tenure</b>	Less than 10 yrs	61	38.6
	10 yrs and above	97	61.39

Figure 3.1 presents the sample distribution in terms of gender. Most of the participants were females (60%).



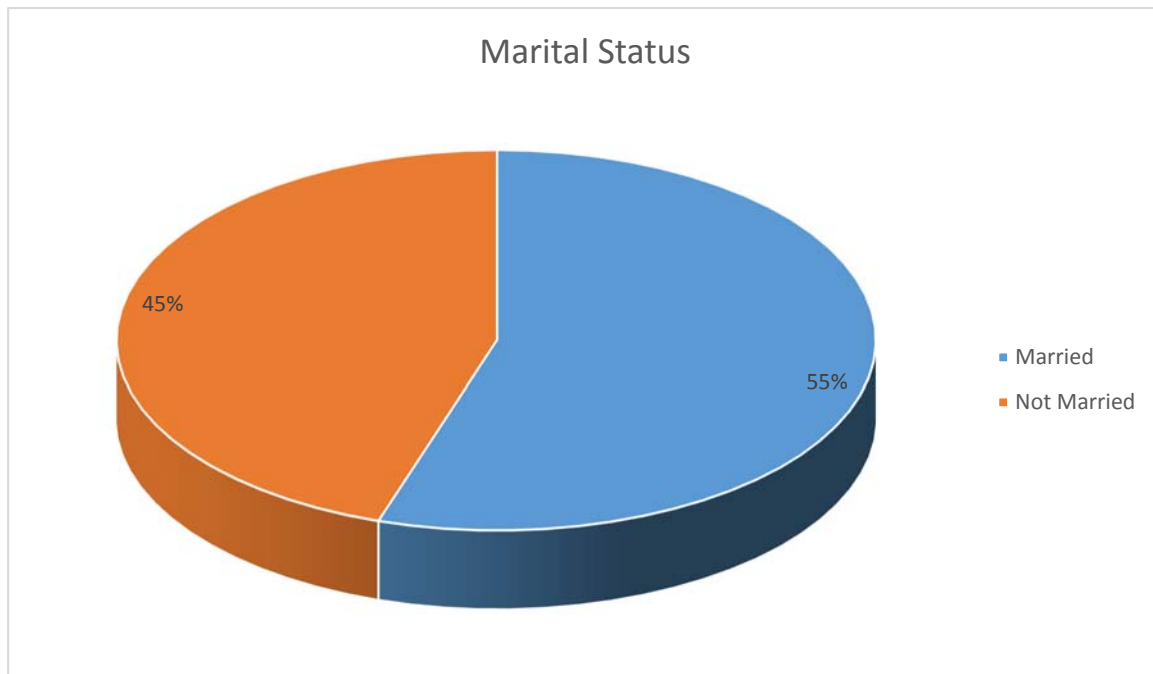
**Figure 3.1: Sample distribution by gender group (N = 158)**

With regard to racial groups, most of the participants were African (75%), followed by White participants (25%). The African group include Black (70%), Coloured (4%) and Indian (1%) races. Figure 3.2 below shows the distribution for the racial groups.



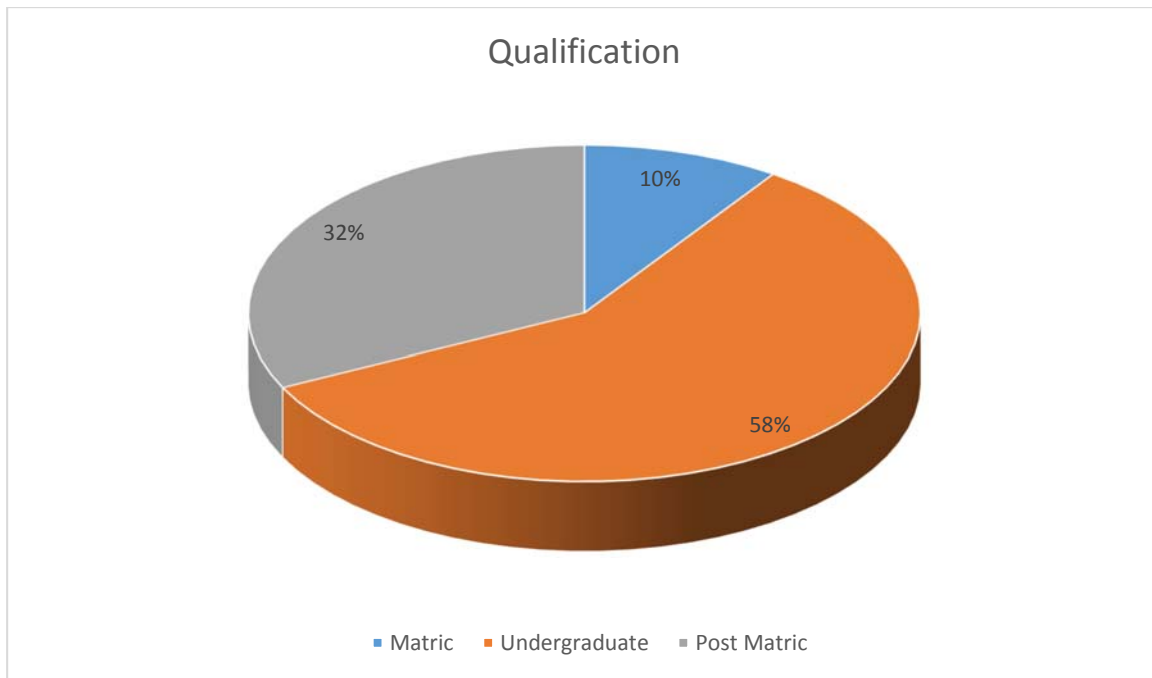
**Figure 3.2: Sample distribution by racial groups (N = 158)**

In terms of the marital status, most of the participants were married (55%), followed by the not married participants (44.93%), which comprised single, divorced and widowed participants. The distribution for marital status is presented in Figure 3.3 below.



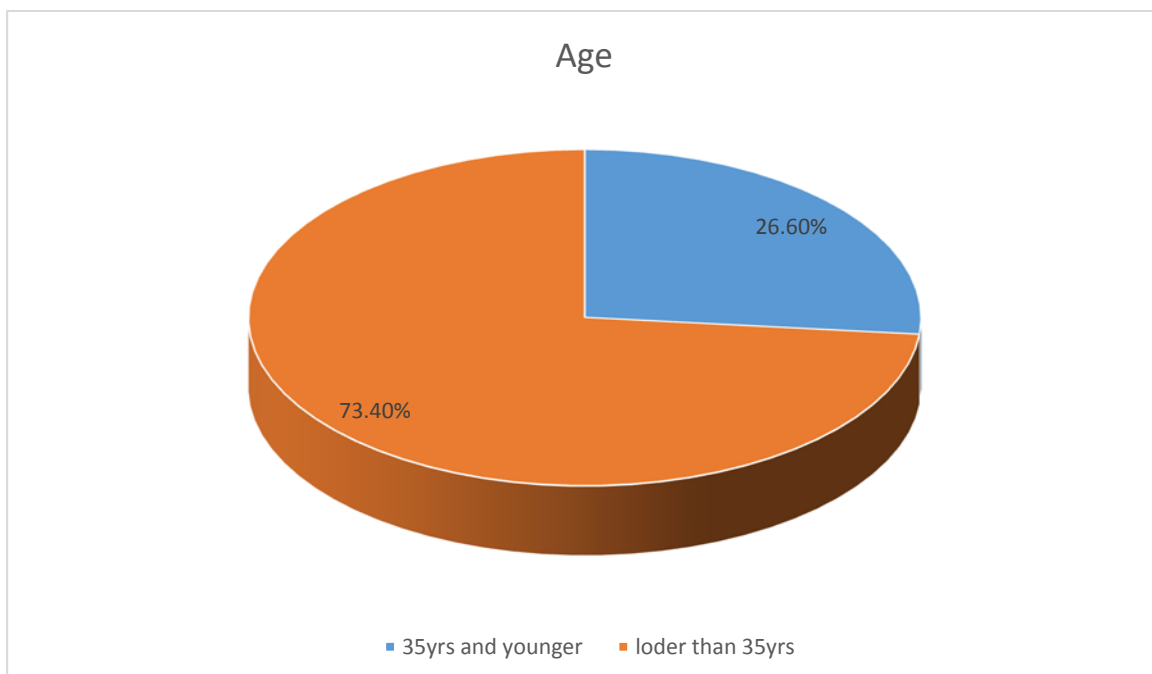
**Figure 3.3: Sample distribution by marital status group (N = 158)**

Figure 3.4 shows the sample distribution for qualifications. In terms of qualifications, most of the participants (58%) had obtained an undergraduate qualification, followed by 32 percent who had obtained a postgraduate qualification. The smallest group had obtained a matric qualification (10%).



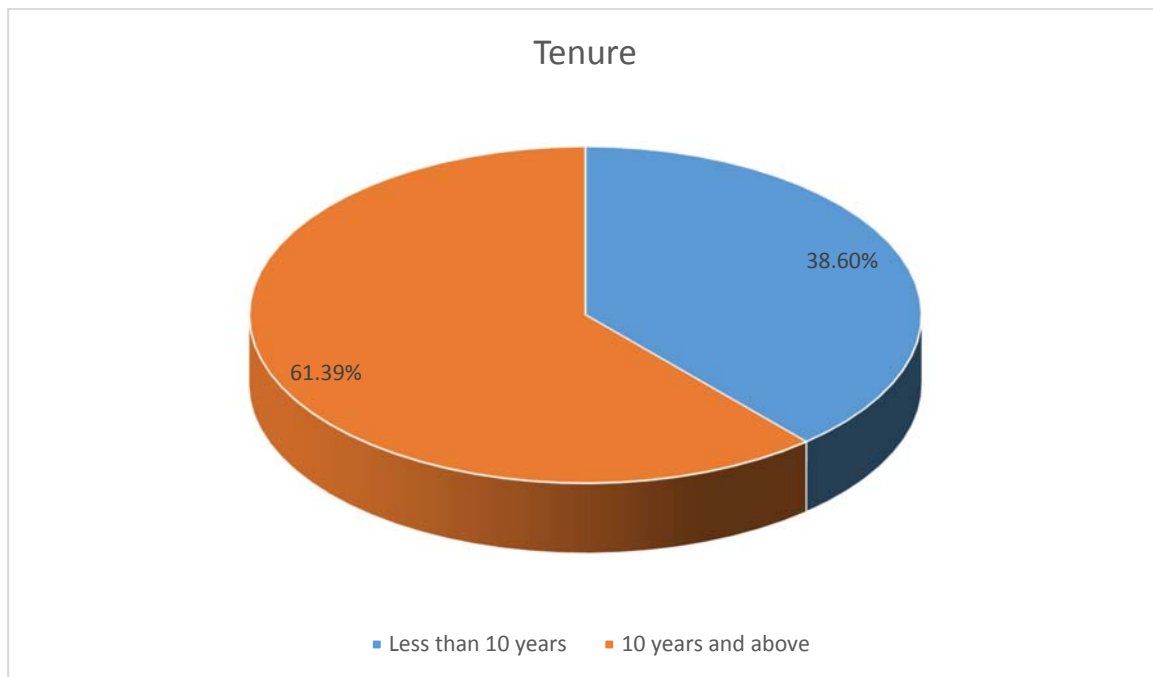
**Figure 3.4: Sample distribution by qualification group (N = 158)**

Figure 3.5 shows the distribution for age. Most of the participants were older than 35 years (73.4%). The mean age was 42 years (SD= 8.82).



**Figure 3.5: Sample distribution by age group (N = 158)**

As shown in Figure 3.6, 61.39 percent of participants had more than 10 years' experience and 38.60 percent of participants had less than 10 years' work experience. The mean tenure was 15 years (SD = 10.3).



**Figure 3.6: Sample distribution by tenure group (N = 158)**

#### *3.2.2.2. Measuring instruments*

Data was collected with the use of the following instruments: biographical questionnaire, Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-SS), Employee Engagement Dimensions scale (EEI) and Employability Attributes Scale (EAS).

##### *a) Biographical questionnaire*

A biographical questionnaire was used to gather the biographical data of the participants such as age, gender, race, qualification, home language and marital status. The questionnaire comprised a set of multiple-choice options, where the respondents ticked the boxes pertaining to them. The biographical data provided valuable analysis of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst the various biographical groups.

*b) The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-SS)*

The MBI-SS consists of 16 items that constitute three scales namely Exhaustion (EX; 5 items), Cynicism (CY; 5 items), and Efficacy (EF; 6 items). All these items were rated on a 7-point rating scale starting from 0 (never) to 6 (always). High scores on EX and CY and low scores on EF indicate burnout (i.e., all EF items are reverse scored, which is denoted by rEF). The MBI-SS meets the psychometric properties of validity (construct) and reliability (Storm & Rothmann, 2003). A study by Storm and Rothmann (2003) confirmed the reliability coefficients of 0.88 for exhaustion, 0.78 for cynicism and 0.79. Another study, by Coker and Omoluabi (2009), found that the reliability coefficients of the MBI were reported at 0.86. These high scores on the MBI coefficients are in line with the findings of Maslach and Jackson (1981), whose findings for the MBI Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.71 to 0.90.

For the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the overall MBI-SS are greater or equal to 0.70, as presented in Table 3.2. The results show that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the MBI dimensions were exhaustion = 0.85; cynicism = 0.73; and professional efficacy = 0.76.

**Table 3.2: Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the MBI-SS and its dimensions**

Scale	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability
General MBI	16	0.70	High
Exhaustion	5	0.85	Very High
Cynicism	5	0.73	High
Professional Efficacy	6	0.76	High

*c) The Employee Engagement Instrument (EEI)*

The EEI of 50 items consisted of six subscales, namely customer service (six items), immediate manager (seven items), organisational commitment (six items), organisational satisfaction (nine items), strategy implementation (10 items), team (12 items). The EEI was rated on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = unsure; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree. A study by Martins and Ledimo (2016) confirmed the validity and reliability of the employee engagement questionnaire

for government institutions. The reliability coefficients of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, ranged between 0.816 and 0.946 (Martins & Ledimo, 2016).

Table 3.3 presents Cronbach's alpha coefficients of EEI and their dimensions for the present study. The results show that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the EEI ranged from 0.82 to 0.96.

**Table 3.3: Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the EEI and its dimensions**

Scale	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability
General EEI	50	0.97	Very High
Customer Service	6	0.82	Very High
Immediate Manager	7	0.94	Very High
Organisational Commitment	6	0.90	Very High
Organisational Satisfaction	9	0.95	Very High
Strategy and Implementation	10	0.95	Very High
Team	12	0.96	Very High

*d) The Employability Attributes Scale (EAS)*

The EAS of 56 items constitutes eight sub-scales, namely career self-management (11 items), cultural competence (five items), self-efficacy (six items), career resilience (six items), sociability (seven items), entrepreneurial orientation (seven items), proactivity (seven items) and emotional literacy (seven items). High scores represent more perceived employability by the participants. According to Potgieter and Coetzee (2013), the EAS scale meets the psychometric properties of validity (construct) and reliability. The reliability coefficients of internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, range between 0.78 and 0.90 for each subscale (Potgieter & Coetzee, 2013).

For the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the EAS and its sub-dimensions were therefore acceptable as they were within the range of 0.78 and 0.90, as shown in Table 3.4.



**Table 3.4: Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the EAS and its dimensions**

Scale	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Reliability
General EAS	56	0.97	Very High
Career Self-Management	11	0.89	Very High
Cultural Competence	5	0.88	Very High
Self-Efficacy	6	0.71	High
Career Resilience	6	0.77	High
Sociability	7	0.77	High
Entrepreneurial Orientation	7	0.76	High
Proactivity	7	0.84	Very High
Emotional Literacy	7	0.87	Very High

### *3.2.2.3. Research procedure and ethical considerations*

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the University of South Africa's Ethics Review Committee (RERC) to conduct the study. The researcher also obtained permission to collect data from the management of the organisation in which the current study was conducted.

The questionnaires were manually distributed to the participants. Each questionnaire included a covering letter, and an informed consent form for the participants to give consent for participation in the research. The informed consent form provided explanations to the participants about the purpose of the research, procedure, potential benefits, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, withdrawal and their rights regarding participating in the study. All participants willingly signed the informed consent form (see Appendix A), and participation was voluntary.

Each of the questionnaires also consisted of the biographical questions, the MBI-SS, the EEI and the EAS questionnaire as well as comprehensive instructions on how to complete the survey.

The method utilised for the data collection was convenience sampling. The questionnaires were sent to participants via hand delivery to their offices. The researcher collected completed questionnaires from the participants' offices. Confidentiality of participants was maintained during the data collection. The

participants' anonymity was also maintained. Furthermore, the participants were not exposed to physical or psychological harm during the study.

To ensure the honesty and integrity of the results, participants were given ample time to complete the questionnaire and the researcher was available for all questions. Completed questionnaires were kept secure and the raw data was captured and converted to the SPSS, version 25 dataset.

#### *3.2.2.4. Statistical analysis*

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.0. The following statistical analyses were computed using the SPSS software program: descriptive and inferential statistics.

##### *a) Stage 1: Descriptive statistics*

Descriptive statistics were computed to describe the data in terms of sample composition and average scores on the burnout inventory, the employee engagement measurement, and the employability attributes scale by using frequencies, means, and standard deviations.

##### *b) Stage 2: Correlational statistics*

Correlational analysis (as part of inferential statistics) was computed using the Pearson correlation ( $r$ ) to determine the strength of the relationships in terms of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability as well as to determine the correlation between demographic variables and burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. As per Cohen guidelines, the researcher used the small effect size,  $r = 0.1 - 0.23$ ; medium,  $r = 0.24 - 0.36$ ; large,  $r = 0.37$  or larger for interpreting the results. The statistical significance value was set at 95 percent confidence interval level ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) for purposes of countering the probability of a Type I error (Levin et al, 2016).

##### *c) Stage 3: Inferential statistics*

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability on burnout. In terms of the significant value, confidence interval level at 95 percent ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) was deemed to be statistically significant. The adjusted  $R^2$  values were used for observing the

independent variables. The practical significance, adjusted  $R^2 \leq 0.12$  (small practical effect size);  $R^2 \geq 0.13 \leq .25$  (moderate practical effect size) and  $R^2 \geq 0.26$  (large practical effect size) were considered for practical significance of the results (Cohen, 1992).

Since the data was normally distributed, the t-test for independent samples and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed to determine differences between groups. The statistically significant value was set at  $p \leq .05$  for interpreting the results.

### 3.3. RESULTS

In this section, the descriptive, correlational and inferential statistics of significant values for burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability are presented.

#### 3.3.1. Descriptive statistics

This section reports on the descriptive statistics for each of the three measuring instruments in respect of means, standard deviations and the shape of the normal distribution. Table 3.5 presents the descriptive statistics for the MBI SS (burnout), EEI (employee engagement) and EAS (self-perceived employability).

**Table 3.5: Descriptive statistics: means, standard deviations and Cronbach's alpha (N=158)**

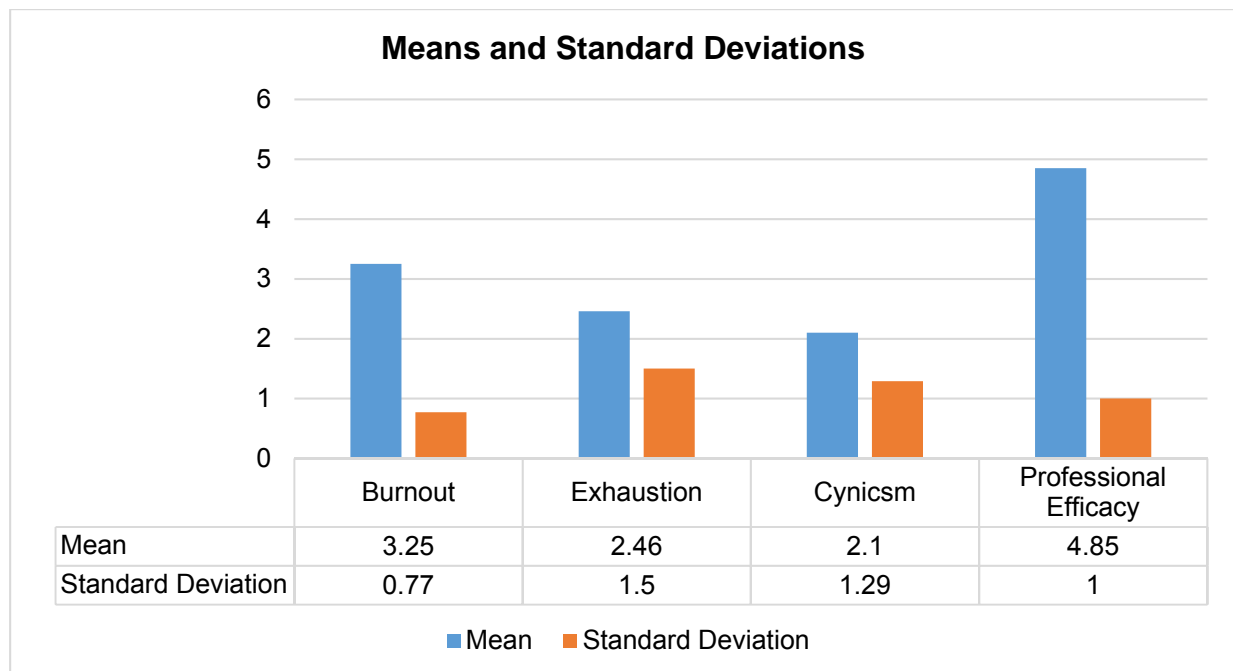
Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha
Burnout	3.25	0.77	0.83
Employee Engagement (EEI)	3.48	0.64	0.97
Employability (EAS)	4.61	0.65	0.96

The mean scores of the three scales ranged between 3.25 and 4.61. The participants obtained a relatively higher mean score on EAS ( $M=4.61$ ). The relatively higher mean score obtained on the EAS indicates that participants perceived themselves as employable. The scores obtained on EEI ( $M = 3.48$ ;  $SD = 0.64$ ) were at a moderate level. This indicates that the participants agreed with the EEI items to a reasonably fair extent, and therefore felt more or less engaged in their work. The participants obtained

relatively lower mean scores on burnout ( $M = 3.25$ ;  $SD = 0.77$ ). The low scores on burnout are indicative of less burnout.

### 3.3.1.1. Descriptive statistics: Burnout (MBI-SS)

Figure 3.6 presents the descriptive statistics on burnout. In terms of the means, the participants scored relatively higher on professional efficacy ( $M = 3.25$ ), which indicates the participants' positive feelings about their work and feelings of competence. The participants scored relatively lower on exhaustion ( $M = 2.46$ ;  $SD = 1.50$ ) and cynicism ( $M = 2.10$ ;  $SD = 1.29$ ), thus indicating that the participants rarely felt emotionally drained and did not experience negative and impersonal attitudes and feelings towards other people.



**Figure 3.7: Descriptive statistics on burnout (N =158)**

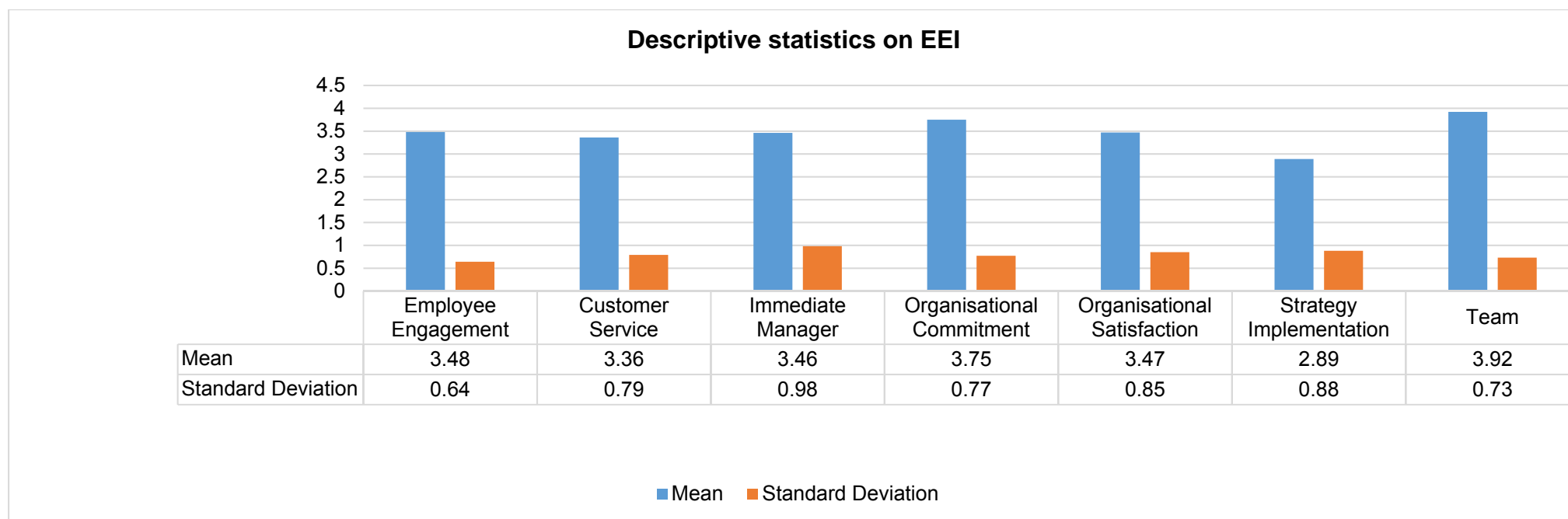
Table 3.6 shows the distribution of the sample scores for burnout. On skewness, all the scales scored between 0.14 and 0.68, thus showing that the distribution is moderately skewed right (Howell, 2004). In terms of kurtosis, all the scores except for professional efficacy scored between -0.55 and -0.01, representing a light-tailed distribution (Howell, 2004).

**Table 3.6: Distribution of the scores on burnout: means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis**

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Burnout	3.25	0.77	0.14	-0.01	0.94	5.31
Exhaustion	2.46	1.50	0.32	-0.55	0.00	6.00
Cynicism	2.10	1.29	0.68	-0.07	0.00	6.00
Professional Efficacy	1.15	1.00	1.08	1.01	0.00	4.83

### *3.3.1.2. Descriptive statistics: Employee engagement (EEI)*

Figure 3.8 presents the descriptive statistics on EEI. In terms of the means, the participants scored relatively higher means on team M = 3.9; SD = 0.73 and on organisational commitment M = 3.75; SD = 0.77. This shows that the participants could effectively engage in teams and were committed to their organisation. The participants obtained moderate scores on customer service (M = 3.36; SD = 0.79), immediate manager (M = 3.46; SD = 0.98) and organisational satisfaction (M = 3.47; SD = 0.85) variables. Relatively lower mean scores were obtained on strategy and implementation (M = 2.89; SD = 0.88). It is clear from the results that most of the participants were generally in agreement with the EEI items, indicating they were feeling engaged with their work at a moderate level.



**Figure 3.8: Descriptive statistics on employee engagement (N =158)**

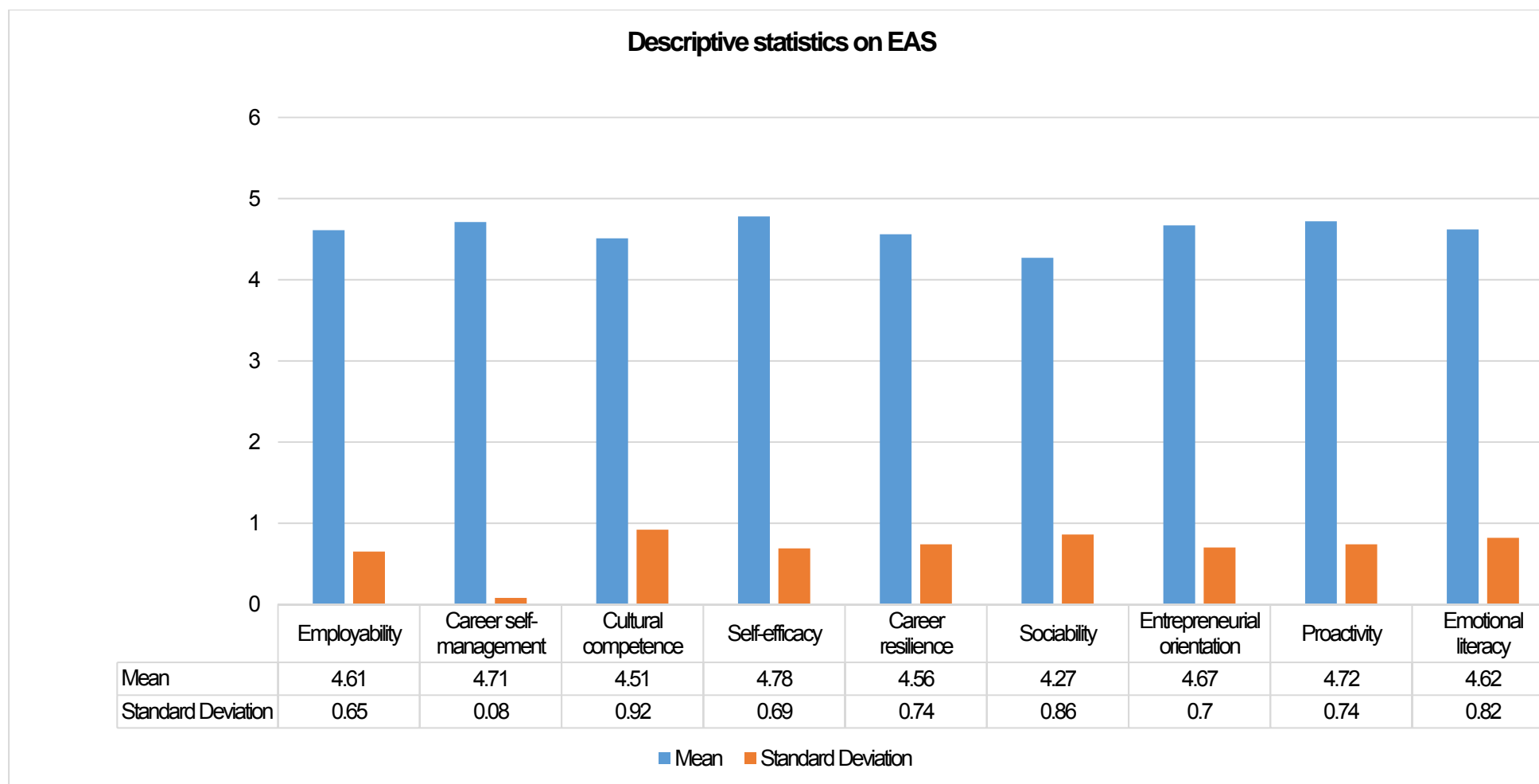
Table 3.7 shows the distribution of the sample scores for EEI. The distribution is skew shaped to the left. All the scores on skewness are between -1.5 and -0.08, thus showing that the distribution is moderately skewed left (Howell, 2004). In terms of the kurtosis, for the overall EEI instrument kurtosis, 0.84, indicates that the distribution is moderately skewed left, with the kurtosis sample score closer to zero, taking the shape of a normal distribution.

**Table 3.7: Distribution of the scores on EEI: means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis**

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Employee Engagement	3.48	0.64	-0.65	0.84	1.10	4.98
Customer Service	3.36	0.79	-0.57	0.45	1.00	5.00
Immediate Manager	3.46	0.98	-0.58	-0.29	1.00	5.00
Organisational Commitment	3.75	0.77	-0.90	1.39	1.00	5.00
Organisational Satisfaction	3.47	0.85	-0.68	0.22	1.00	5.00
Strategy Implementation	2.89	0.88	-0.08	-0.47	1.00	5.00
Team	3.92	0.73	-1.51	4.12	1.00	5.00

#### 3.3.1.3. Descriptive statistics: Self-perceived employability (EAS)

Figure 3.9 presents the descriptive statistics for EAS. The participants obtained a relatively higher mean on self-efficacy ( $M = 4.78$ ;  $SD = 0.69$ ), and relatively lower mean on the sub-scale sociability ( $M = 4.27$ ;  $SD = 0.86$ ). These scores indicate that the participants perceived themselves as employable. They saw themselves as capable of retaining and fulfilling their work (Coetzee et al., 2016) as well as being in control over their careers.



**Figure 3.9: Descriptive statistics on self-perceived employability (N =158)**



Table 3.8 shows the skewness for the EAS scale and sub-scales. The shape is negatively skewed, and has coefficients ranging between -0.07 and -0.47. These coefficients fall within the normality recommended range of -1 and +1 (Howell, 2004). The kurtosis values ranged between -0.15 and 0.11, since the scores are closer to zero, the shape of a normal distribution is reflected.

**Table 3.8: Distribution of the scores on EAS: means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis**

Variable	Mean	Std Dev	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Employability	4.61	0.65	-0.07	-0.54	2.70	6.00
Career self-management	4.71	0.80	-0.37	-0.53	2.55	6.00
Cultural competence	4.51	0.92	-0.47	0.11	1.40	6.00
Self-efficacy	4.78	0.69	-0.40	-0.15	2.83	6.00
Career resilience	4.56	0.74	-0.15	-0.54	2.33	6.00
Sociability	4.27	0.86	-0.23	-0.39	1.71	6.00
Entrepreneurial orientation	4.67	0.70	-0.16	-0.64	3.00	6.00
Proactivity	4.72	0.74	-0.14	-0.41	2.43	6.00
Emotional literacy	4.62	0.82	-0.31	-0.19	2.29	6.00

### 3.3.2. Correlational statistics

A correlation determines the relative strength of a linear relationship between two numerical variables (Levin, Szabat & Stephen, 2016). The current study utilised Pearson product moment correlation to investigate the strength of association between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Pearson's  $r$  ranges between  $r = -1$  and  $+1$  whereby  $-1$  represents a perfect negative correlation and  $+1$  represents a perfect positive correlation (Levin et al, 2016). As per Cohen guidelines the researcher used the small effect size,  $r = 0.1 - 0.23$ ; medium,  $r = 0.24 - 0.36$ ; large,  $r = 0.37$  or larger for interpreting the results. In addition, the level of significance  $p$ -value was set at  $p \leq 0.05$  as a cut-off point.

### 3.3.2.1. Correlation analysis between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability

Table 3.9 indicates the existence of significant negative correlation between burnout and each of its dimensions (exhaustion, cynicism and professional efficacy) against employee engagement and its dimensions (customer service, immediate manager, organisational commitment, organisational satisfaction, strategy implementation). The correlation coefficients between burnout and its dimensions against employee engagement and its dimensions are all negative and they vary from  $r = -0.24$ ; negative medium effect size to  $r = -0.67$ ; negative large effect size at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

**Table 3.9: Correlations between subscales of employee engagement and burnout: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, N = 158**

Variable	Burnout	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Professional Efficacy
Employee Engagement	-0.55948 <.0001**	-0.44627 <.0001**	-0.41778 <.0001**	-0.40383 <.0001**
Customer Service	-0.45137 <.0001**	-0.33203 <.0001**	-0.34732 <.0001**	-0.34994 <.0001**
Immediate Manager	-0.37042 <.0001**	-0.30979 <.0001**	-0.28835 0.0002**	-0.23662 0.0028**
Organisational Commitment	-0.55148 <.0001**	-0.42971 <.0001**	-0.43813 <.0001**	-0.38240 <.0001**
Organisational Satisfaction	-0.67298 <.0001**	-0.52758 <.0001**	-0.57158 <.0001**	-0.42272 <.0001**
Strategy Implementation	-0.43306 <.0001**	-0.37189 <.0001**	-0.27872 0.0004**	-0.32752 <.0001**

\*\* $p \leq 0.05$

Table 3.10 indicates the correlation between burnout and self-perceived employability. The relationship between the overall burnout and the overall employability is negative ( $r = -0.79$ ; negative large effect size); however, it is not statistically significant ( $p \leq 0.32$ ). The strongest correlations were observed between professional efficacy (reversed coded), which significantly correlated with the following employability dimensions: with career self-management ( $p \leq 0.025$ ), career resilience ( $p \leq 0.0529$ ) sociability ( $p \leq 0.0038$ ), proactivity ( $p \leq 0.0118$ ), emotional literacy ( $p \leq 0.029$ ) and the

overall employability variable ( $p \leq 0.017$ ). The correlations vary from  $r = -0.15$  (negative small effect size) to  $r = -0.23$  (negative small effect size).

**Table 3.10: Correlations between subscales of burnout and self-perceived employability: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, N = 158, Prob > |r| under H0: Rho=0**

Variables	Burnout	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Professional Efficacy
<b>Employability</b>	-0.07937 0.3215 158	-0.00100 0.9901 158	0.00041 0.9960 158	-0.20020 0.0117** 158
<b>Career self-management</b>	-0.11466 0.1514 158	-0.03141 0.6953 158	-0.06791 0.3965 158	-0.17747 0.0257** 158
<b>Cultural competence</b>	-0.08960 0.2645 157	-0.04467 0.5785 157	-0.02063 0.7976 157	-0.14910 0.0624 157
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	0.07657 0.3405 157	0.13700 0.0871 157	0.11660 0.1459 157	-0.10391 0.1953 157
<b>Career resilience</b>	-0.05418 0.4990 158	-0.01240 0.8771 158	0.03024 0.7060 158	-0.15429 0.0529** 158
<b>Sociability</b>	-0.06633 0.4076 158	0.04498 0.5746 158	0.00404 0.9598 158	-0.22898 0.0038** 158
<b>Entrepreneurial orientation</b>	0.00865 0.9144 157	0.05410 0.5010 157	0.07286 0.3645 157	-0.12487 0.1192 157
<b>Proactivity</b>	-0.11974 0.1340 158	-0.03882 0.6282 158	-0.05054 0.5283 158	-0.19980 0.0118** 158
<b>Emotional literacy</b>	-0.10314 0.1986 157	-0.06757 0.4004 157	-0.00313 0.9690 157	-0.17360 0.0297** 157

\*\* $p \leq 0.05$

None of the dimensions of the employability scale correlated significantly with the exhaustion and cynicism variables. The relationship between the overall burnout and the overall employability was negative but not significant.

Table 3.11 provides a summary of the correlations between employee engagement and self-perceived employability. The results showed a positive but not significant correlation between employee engagement and self-perceived employability ( $r = 0.11040$ ;  $p \leq 0.1673$ ; positive small effect size) exist. Two dimensions of employee engagement namely customer service and strategy and implementation correlated significantly with some of the dimensions of employability.

*i. Customer service*

Customer service positively correlated significantly with the overall employability ( $p = 0.021$ ) and the employability dimensions, namely career self-management ( $p = 0.0005$ ), sociability ( $p = 0.034$ ) and proactivity ( $p = 0.030$ ). The correlations vary from  $r = 0.164$  (small effect size) to  $r = 0.27$  (medium effect size) at  $p < 0.05$ . This basically means that as the level of customer service positively increases, the variables overall employability, sociability and proactivity also increase.

*ii. Strategy and implementation*

Strategy and implementation correlated significantly and positively with career self-management ( $r = 0.22$ ;  $p = 0.0054$ ; small effect size) and sociability ( $r = 0.23$ ;  $p = 0.0035$ ; small size effect). The results show that the more the participants' level of strategy and implementation positively increases, the more the levels career self-management and sociability increase.

<b>EI and EAS</b>	<b>Employee Engagement</b>	<b>Customer Service</b>	<b>Immediate Manager</b>	<b>Organisational Commitment</b>	<b>Organisational satisfaction</b>	<b>Strategy implementation</b>	<b>Team</b>
<b>Employability</b>	0.11040 0.1673	0.18478 0.0201	-0.03667 0.6474	0.09240 0.2482	0.11547 0.1485	0.14956 0.0607	0.03383 0.6730
<b>Career-self management</b>	0.18135 0.0226**	0.27372 0.0005**	-0.01581 0.8437	0.14978 0.0603	0.19898 0.0122	0.22026 0.0054**	0.05558 0.4879
<b>Cultural competence</b>	0.01802 0.8227	0.03060 0.7036	-0.04212 0.6004	0.03595 0.6549	0.00421 0.9583	0.05778 0.4723	0.00133 0.9869
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	-0.02250 0.7797	0.07792 0.3320	-0.11589 0.1484	-0.02451 0.7606	-0.01761 0.8268	0.00132 0.9870	0.00790 0.9218
<b>Career resilience</b>	0.08343 0.2973	0.08747 0.2744	-0.00837 0.9168	0.11295 0.1577	0.09672 0.2267	0.13602 0.0884	0.01561 0.8457
<b>Sociability</b>	0.14457 0.0699	0.16474 0.0386**	-0.07399 0.3555	0.11504 0.1501	0.14710 0.0651	0.23083 0.0035**	0.07806 0.3296
<b>Entrepreneurial orientation</b>	0.02986 0.7104	0.13782 0.0852	-0.05819 0.4691	0.02619 0.7448	0.03162 0.6943	0.06336 0.4305	-0.02541 0.7521

<b>Proactivity</b>	0.10281	0.17253	-0.04232	0.07113	0.11326	0.10111	0.07912
	0.1987	0.0302**	0.5975	0.3745	0.1565	0.2062	0.3231
<b>Emotional literacy</b>	0.09262	0.16785	0.07436	0.05159	0.08155	0.07628	.01555
	0.2486	0.0356**	0.3546	0.5211	0.3099	0.3424	0.8467

\*\*p ≤ 0,05

**Table 3.11: Correlations between subscales of employee engagement and self-perceived employability: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, N = 158,**

**Prob > |r| under H0: Rho=0**

Table 3.12 provides the overall summary of the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Employee engagement relates negatively with burnout and the correlation is statistically significant ( $r = -0.56$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ; negative large effect size). Self-perceived employability relates negatively to burnout but the correlation is not significant ( $-0.09647$ ;  $p < 0.2279$ ; small effect size). The strength of the relationship between burnout and self-perceived employability is weak and a conclusion in terms of the relationship cannot be accepted.

**Table 3.12: Correlations between subscales of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability: Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, N = 158, Prob > |r| under H0: Rho=0**

Variables	Burnout	Exhaustion	Cynicism	Professional Efficacy
Employee Engagement	-0.55948	-0.44627	-0.41778	-0.40383
P-value	<.0001**	<.0001**	<.0001**	<.0001**
Employability	-0.07937	-0.00100	0.00041	-0.20020
p-value	0.3215	0.9901	0.9960	0.0117**

\*\* $p \leq 0,05$

Based on the above statistical correlational analysis, the evidence of the following correlations in terms of burnout, employee engagement, and self-perceived employability and the biographical variables were revealed:

- A negative and significant correlation between burnout and employee engagement was found.
- A negative but non-significant relationship between burnout and self-perceived employability was found.
- A positive but non-significant relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability was found.
- Positive and significant correlations were found between employee engagement dimensions, namely customer service and strategy and implementation, as well as with employability dimensions, namely career self-management sociability and proactivity.

### 3.3.3. Inferential statistics

Inferential statistics were used to make inferences about the population from which the data was drawn. These included standard multiple regression analyses and tests for significant mean differences between the demographic variables (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications, tenure and job level), burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. The practical significance, adjusted  $R^2 \leq 0.12$  (small practical effect size);  $R^2 \geq 0.13 \leq .25$  (moderate practical effect size) and  $R^2 \geq 0.26$  (large practical effect size) were considered for practical significance of the results (Cohen, 1992).

#### 3.3.3.1. Multiple regression analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the regression between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability, as well as the relationship between the demographic variables (age, gender, racial groups, marital status, qualifications, job level, home language, and tenure), burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. The level of statistical significance of the standard multiple regressions used in this study was  $F(p) \leq .05$  as the cut-off for rejecting the null hypotheses.

##### *a) Regression analysis with burnout as the dependent variable and employee engagement, self-perceived employability and demographics as the independent variables*

Table 3.13 below summarises the regression model between the biographical variables (age, gender, racial groups, marital status and tenure) and employee engagement and its sub-scales (customer service, immediate manager, organisational commitment, organisational satisfaction, strategy and implementation and team), self-perceived employability and its sub-scales (career self-management cultural competence, self-efficacy, career resilience, sociability, entrepreneurial orientation, proactivity, emotional literacy) as the independent variables and burnout the dependent variable.

The regression of the employee engagement subscales, self-perceived employability subscales and demographic variables on burnout produced a statistically significant



model ( $F = 7.66$ ;  $p < .0001$ ), accounting for 56 percent ( $R^2 = 0.56$ ; large practical size effect) of the variance in the burnout variable.

The regression of the demographic variables (age, qualification, marital status and gender) on burnout were negative but not statistically significant. For race and tenure the regression was positive but not statistically significant. The regression of the employee engagement subscales on burnout were all not statistically significant except for organisational satisfaction ( $p = -0.78$ ;  $r < .0001$ ), and team ( $p = 0.202$ ;  $r = 0.0276$ ). For the regression of self-perceived employability on burnout, only one of the dimensions of the employee engagement, namely proactivity  $p = -0.49$ ;  $r = -2.29$ ;  $r = 0.0133$  was statistically significant.

**Table 3.13: Multiple regression statistics summary: burnout as dependent variable and employee engagement, self-perceived employability and demographics as independent variables**

Variable	Parameter Estimate	Standard error	Standardised	t	p	F	Adjusted R Square	R
<b>Intercept</b>	3.85258	0.65020	0	5.93	<.0001	7.66	0.4876	0.5608
<b>Gender</b>	-0.14661	0.12552	-0.07661	-1.17	0.2449			
<b>Race</b>	0.49607	0.29541	0.22649	1.68	0.0955			
<b>Qualification</b>	-0.14386	0.13311	-0.07480	-1.08	0.2818			
<b>Marital Status</b>	-0.06748	0.11898	-0.03554	-0.57	0.5716			
<b>Job level</b>	0.20532	0.15497	0.09202	1.32	0.1875			
<b>Age</b>	-0.17655	0.16605	-0.09068	-1.06	0.2896			
<b>Tenure</b>	0.01409	0.14401	0.00726	0.10	0.9222			
<b>Customer Service</b>	-0.03366	0.10782	-0.02805	-0.31	0.7554			
<b>Immediate Manager</b>	-0.02128	0.07629	-0.02191	-0.28	0.7807			
<b>Organisational Commitment</b>	-0.15915	0.12495	-0.12944	-1.27	0.2050			
<b>Organisational Satisfaction</b>	-0.78603	0.12212	-0.69158	-6.44	<.0001**			
<b>Strategy Implementation</b>	0.12931	0.10830	0.12032	1.19	0.2346			

<b>Team</b>	0.20213	0.09072	0.15558	2.23	0.0276**			
<b>Career-self management</b>	0.01844	0.14055	0.01549	0.13	0.8958			
<b>Cultural competence</b>	-0.14027	0.08712	-0.13559	-1.61	0.1098			
<b>Self-efficacy</b>	0.22436	0.12966	0.16300	1.73	0.0859			
<b>Career-resilience</b>	0.18491	0.17125	0.14431	1.08	0.2822			
<b>Sociability</b>	0.22235	0.13851	0.20135	1.61	0.1108			
<b>Entrepreneurial orientation</b>	0.20380	0.15437	0.15133	1.32	0.1891			
<b>Proactivity</b>	-0.49359	0.19672	-0.38226	-2.51	0.0133**			
<b>Emotional literacy</b>	-0.14126	0.10560	-0.12270	-1.34	0.1833			

$p \leq .05^{**}$ ;  $+R^2 \leq .12$  (small practical size effect);  $++R^2 \geq .13 \leq .25$  (medium practical size effect;  $+++ R^2 \geq .26$  (large practical size effect)

*b) Regression analysis with burnout as the dependent variable and employee engagement and self-perceived employability as the independent variables*

As shown in Table 3.14, the regression of the employee engagement and self-perceived employability variables on the burnout variable produced a statistically significant model ( $F = 35.36$ ;  $p < 0.0001$ ), accounting for  $R^2 = 0.31$  (large practical effect size) of the variance in the burnout variable. The regression analysis in terms of the employee engagement with burnout produced a negative and statistically significant (standardised estimate =  $-0.81$ ;  $Pr < 0.00$ ) regression. In terms of the regression between self-perceived employability variables and burnout, the regression was negative but no statistically significant regression was produced (standardised estimate =  $-0.02$ ;  $Pr < 0.79$ ).

**Table 3.14: Multiple regression statistics summary: burnout as dependent variable and employee engagement and self-perceived employability as independent variables**

Variable	Unstandardised		Standardised Estimate	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	Adjusted R Square	<i>R</i>
	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error						
Intercept	4.82429	0.53463	0	9.02	<.0001**	35.36	0.3045	0.3133
Employability	-0.02571	0.09663	-0.01782	-0.27	0.7905			
Employee Engagement	-0.81768	0.09822	-0.55752	-8.33	<.0001**			

$p \leq .05^{**}$ ;  $+R^2 \leq .12$  (small practical size effect);  $++R^2 \geq .13 \leq .25$  (medium practical size effect);  $+++ R^2 \geq .26$  (large practical size effect)

Based on the above regression analysis, the following regressions were summarised:

- Burnout produced a negative and statistically significant regression with employee engagement.
- Burnout produced a negative but not statistically significant regression with self-perceived employability.
- The regression of the demographic variables (age, qualification, marital status and gender) on burnout was negative but not statistically significant.
- The employee engagement subscales on burnout for organisational satisfaction and team produced a statistically significant regression.

- The self-perceived employability instrument on burnout produced a statistically significant regression on proactivity.

### 3.3.3.2. Test for significant mean differences

The test for significant mean differences was conducted in the current study to examine whether the population from the various demographic groups (age, gender, race, marital status and qualifications) differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

#### a) Age

Table 3.15 shows the differences in mean scores on the measurement scales between the age groups, burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. The test was done by means of a t-test procedure. As shown in Table 3.15, no statistically significant mean differences were found between the participants who were below or equal to 35 years and the participants older than 35 years in terms of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

**Table 3.15: Significant mean differences: Age**

Age Categories		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig
Burnout Overall Score	35 yrs and younger	42	1,8878	0,94358	0,881
	Older than 35 yrs	116	1,9141	0,98231	
Employee Engagement Overall Score	35 yrs and younger	42	3,5257	0,78052	0,593
	Older than 35 yrs	116	3,4634	0,59006	
Employability Overall Score	35 yrs and younger	42	4,6185	0,68241	0,859
	Older than 35 yrs	116	4,5976	0,64248	

$p \leq .05$

#### b) Marital status

The differences in mean scores on the measurement scales between marital status groups were tested by means of a t-test procedure. Marital status was clustered into two groups, namely the married group (which comprised all married participants) and the unmarried group (which comprised single, divorced and widowed participants). The results in Table 3.16 show that the mean scores and standard deviations on all the dimensions were similar, and therefore, no significant differences were found

between the participants and burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

**Table 3.16: Significant mean differences: Marital status**

Marital Status		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Sig
Burnout	Married	87	1,9130	0,94472	0,10128	0,933
	Unmarried	71	1,8998	1,00520	0,11930	
Employee Engagement	Married	87	3,4276	0,66003	0,07076	0,259
	Unmarried	71	3,5442	0,62267	0,07390	
Employability	Married	87	4,6323	0,67279	0,07213	0,535
	Unmarried	71	4,5674	0,62661	0,07436	

$p \leq .05$

### c) Race

Table 3.17 indicates significant mean differences between the race groups and both employee engagement and employability as well as their dimensions. The test was also conducted by means of a t-test procedure. Results in Table 3.17 indicate no significant mean differences between age and burnout. There were also no significant mean differences between age and employee engagement; however, on two of the subscales of employee engagement, namely organisational commitment (Black group;  $M = 3,81$  and the White group;  $M = 3,52$ ) and strategy implementation (Black group;  $M = 2.99$  and the White group;  $M = 2.56$ ) significant mean differences were found between the racial groups. The results demonstrate the following:

- The Black group obtained the highest mean score compared to the White group in terms of organisational commitment. This means that the Black group experienced the dimension of organisational commitment significantly more positively than the White group.
- The Black group also obtained the highest mean score compared to the White group in terms of strategy and implementation. The Black group experienced the dimension of strategy and implementation significantly more positively than the White group.

In terms of self-perceived employability, statistically significant mean differences were found between the racial groups and self-perceived employability and its subscales. Overall the mean scores of the Black group (M = 4,68) were higher than the mean score of the White group (M = 4,36). The significant means scores for the sub-scales were as follows: Self-efficacy (Black group; M = 4,84 and White group: M = 4,58), Career resilience (Black group: M = 4,64 and White group: M = 4,32), Sociability (Black group: M = 4,4260 and White group: M = 3,78) Entrepreneurial orientation (Black group M = 4,7615 and White group: M = 4,3828 Career self-management (Black group: M = 4,86 and White group: M = 4,21). The results show that the Black participants experienced self-perceived employability significantly more positively than the White participants.

**Table 3.17: Significant mean differences: Race**

Race Categories		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig
Burnout	Black	119	1,8614	0,90057	0,302
	White	39	2,0464	1,15606	
Employee Engagement	Black	119	3,5245	0,67199	0,129381
	White	39	3,3441	0,53546	
Employability	Black	119	4,6815	0,66954	0,008
	White	39	4,364	0,53106	
Organisational Commitment	Black	119	3,8193	0,73569	0,042
	White	39	3,5299	0,84282	
Strategy and Implementation	Black	119	2,9899	0,91664	0,009
	White	39	2,5667	0,69028	
Career Self-Management	Black	119	4,8654	0,74489	0.000
	White	39	4,2184	0,76527	
Self-Efficacy	Black	118	4,8475	0,71298	0,039
	White	39	4,5855	0,56825	
Career Resilience	Black	119	4,6415	0,76458	0,021
	White	39	4,3248	0,63054	
Sociability	Black	119	4,426	0,83209	0.000

	White	39	3,7875	0,76502	
Entrepreneurial Orientation	Black	118	4,7615	0,68653	0,003
	White	39	4,3828	0,66936	

$p \leq .05$

#### d) Gender

Table 3.18 shows the results for mean differences between the biographical variable gender, burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Gender was clustered into two groups, namely males and females. The t-test procedure was used to generate the results. The results show no statistically significant mean differences were found between gender, and the main constructs burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. However, significant mean differences were found between males and females in terms of self-perceived employability dimensions, namely entrepreneurial orientation (males:  $M = 4.8$  and females: 4.58), and proactivity (males:  $M = 4.88$  and females:  $M = 4.62$ ). The results mean that the male participants experienced the dimension entrepreneurial orientation significantly more positively than female participants. Similarly, the male participants experienced the dimension proactivity significantly more positively than female participants.

**Table 3.18: Significant mean differences: Gender**

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std Dev	Sig
Burnout	Male	64	1.7041	0.9257	0.0872
	Female	94	1.9661	0.9482	
Employee Engagement	Male	64	3.4156	0.6634	0.2997
	Female	94	3.5243	0.6308	
Employability	Male	64	4.7182	0.6352	0.0961
	Female	94	4.5415	0.6619	
Proactivity	Male	64	4.8772	0.7058	0.0306
	Female	94	4.6185	0.7482	
Entrepreneurial Orientation	Male	64	4.7969	0.6388	0.0542
	Female	93	4.5783	0.7287	

$p \leq .05$

#### e) Tenure



Table 3.19 shows test scores in terms of significant mean differences between tenure, burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. The test was conducted by means of a t-test procedure. Tenure was clustered in terms of two groups, namely participants who have less than 10 years' work experience and participants with at least 10 years' work experience. The results show that significant mean differences for tenure were found between employee engagement and its sub-dimensions customer service, organisational satisfaction and strategy implementation.

Table 3.20 indicates that significant mean differences were found between employee engagement (less than 10 yr: M = 3,6498; 10 yrs and above: M = 3,37); customer service (less than 10 yrs: M = 3,58; 10 yrs and above: M = 3,23); organisational satisfaction (less than 10 yrs: M = 3,6630; 10 yrs and above: M = 3,35); and strategy and implementation (less than 10 yrs: M = 3,12; 10 yrs and above: M = 2,73). In terms of all the variables listed above, the participants with less than ten years' work experience were more positively engaged in their work and organisation compared to the participants with more than ten years' work experience.

**Table 3.19: Significant mean differences: Tenure**

Tenure Categories		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig
Burnout	Less than 10 yrs	61	1,7811	0,91996	0,196
	10 yrs and above	97	1,9864	0,99548	
Employee Engagement	Less than 10 yrs	61	3,6498	0,58497	0,008
	10 yrs and above	97	3,3732	0,65938	
Customer Service	Less than 10 yrs	61	3,5765	0,75803	0,007
	10 yrs and above	97	3,2268	0,78770	
Organisational Satisfaction	Less than 10 yrs	61	3,6630	0,77724	0,024
	10 yrs and above	97	3,3505	0,87685	
Strategy and Implementation	Less than 10 yrs	61	3,1230	0,86456	0,007
	10 yrs and above	97	2,7361	0,86641	
Employability	Less than 10 yrs	61	4,6232	0,67048	0,760
	10 yrs and above	97	4,5905	0,64197	0,762

$p \leq .05$

f) *Qualification*

The differences in mean scores on the measurement scales between qualification groups, burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability were tested by means of ANOVA procedure. Qualification was clustered into three groups, namely groups of participants with a matric qualification, an undergraduate qualification and a postgraduate qualification. Table 3.20 shows that significant mean differences were found between qualification categories and the dimensions of employee engagement, namely organisational commitment (participants with matric qualification:  $M = 3,9444$ ; participants with undergraduate qualification:  $M = 3,8315$ ; participants with postgraduate qualification:  $M = 3,5392$ ) and strategy and implementation (participants with matric qualification:  $M = 3,25$ ; participants with undergraduate qualification:  $M = 2.94$ ; participants with postgraduate qualification:  $M = 2.67$ ), in terms of organisational commitment.

**Table 3.20: Significant mean differences: Qualification**

Variables	Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Burnout	Matric	15	1,8207	0,91115	0,334
	Undergraduate	92	1,8292	0,94849	
	Postgraduate	51	2,0730	1,01910	
	Total	158	1,9071	0,96925	
Employee Engagement	Matric	15	3,6800	0,54374	0,193
	Undergraduate	92	3,5113	0,65768	
	Postgraduate	51	3,3647	0,63667	
	Total	158	3,4800	0,64411	
Organisational Commitment	Matric	15	3,9444	0,59651	0,054
	Undergraduate	92	3,8315	0,74883	
	Postgraduate	51	3,5392	0,82299	
	Total	158	3,7479	0,77096	
Strategy and Implementation	Matric	15	3,2533	0,72197	0,052
	Undergraduate	92	2,9424	0,89679	
	Postgraduate	51	2,6745	0,86530	

	Total	158	2,8854	0,88338	
Employability	Matric	15	4,6131	0,71290	0,908
	Undergraduate	92	4,6199	0,64245	
	Postgraduate	51	4,5701	0,66060	
	Total	158	4,6032	0,65119	

Based on the correlational and inferential statistics as obtained and discussed above, the results provided supporting evidence for rejecting hypotheses 1 & 2:

- Hypothesis 1: There is a statistically significant relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst the South African public sector employees.
- Hypothesis 2: South African public sector employees from the various demographic groups (age, gender, tenure, race, qualification, marital status) differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.
- Hypothesis 5: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in a sample of the South African public sector employees.

The results did show a statistically significant relationship between burnout and employee engagement; however, the relationship with self-perceived employability was not significant. Therefore hypothesis 1 cannot be supported. In addition, no significant differences between demographic groups, age and marital status were found in terms of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Therefore hypothesis 2 cannot be supported. In terms of hypothesis 5, the findings of the study show a positive relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability but the correlation was not statistically significant; consequently, hypothesis 5 is rejected.

However, the results provided supportive evidence for hypotheses 3 & 4.

- Hypothesis 3: There is a statistically significant negative relationship between employee engagement and burnout amongst public sector employees.

- Hypothesis 4: There is a statistically significant negative relationship between self-perceived employability and burnout amongst public sector employees.

### **3.4. DISCUSSION**

This study examined the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability, as well as the relationship between the demographic variables (age, gender, race, marital status, tenure, and qualifications) burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

#### **3.4.1. Biographical profile of the sample**

The sample population consisted of 158 participants employed in a South African public sector institution. A non-probability sampling was applied. Most of the participants were females (60%). The Black participants were the majority in the racial group (70%). Most of the participants were married (55%); had at least obtained undergraduate qualifications (58%); were older than 35 years (73%); and had more than 10 years' work experience in the department (61.8%).

Overall the sample showed that employees experience relatively low levels of burnout. This means they do not frequently suffer from numerous physical and emotional stressors because of their work. Consequently, the participants reported relatively moderate to high levels of employee engagement, which indicates that the participants agreed with the employee engagement statements. This shows that the participants were more proactive, productive and committed to their work. They were also personally attached to their work and the organisation (Martins & Ledimo, 2016).

The results in terms of the levels of burnout and employee engagement differ from most results obtained by previous studies conducted in the South African public sector on the topic of burnout and engagement. This difference is against the background that most studies on burnout and engagement conducted within the South African public sector context mainly focused on human services occupations such as the police, health care, and social welfare (Palazzo, Carlotto, & Aerts, 2008; Tsigilis, et al, 2006; Schaufeli, Taris, Rhehen, 2008). Whilst the current study was conducted in a diplomatic, office work environment where the type of occupations does not involve serving people directly, thus characterised as the non-human service occupations such as managers, administrators and white collar employees (Brand-Labuschagne

et al., 2012). However the results still confirm the negative relationship between burnout and engagement, which is consistent with most findings of previous studies (Schaufeli et al., 2009; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2010). The results also confirmed that indeed engaged employees are more productive and provide better customer service (Nienaber & Martins, 2015). As a result, they cope better with work challenges, because they are more resilient and better manage stressful situations (Maslach, 2011; Moodley, 2010).

In terms of self-perceived employability, the results in the current study showed that employees regularly self-perceive their possibilities to succeed within the organisation and or the labour market. Considering the relatively low scores on burnout, the results of the study are consistent with the literature, which has proven that employees who possess more attributes of self-perceived employability tend to experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

The study also investigated how biographical variables such as age, gender, marital status, race, tenure, home language, qualification and job level relate with burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. The test for significant mean differences was conducted in the current study, and it was found that the samples from the various demographic groups (race, qualifications, tenure, and gender) differed significantly in their levels of employee engagement and self-perceived employability. No significant mean differences were found between burnout and any of the biographical variables. These results are discussed in more detail in section 3.4.5.

### **3.4.2. Research aim 1: To determine the empirical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in a sample of public sector employees**

The aim of the study to determine the existence of a relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability in the chosen organisation was achieved.

The results of the study showed that a negative relationship exists between burnout as the dependent variable and employee engagement and self-perceived

employability as the independent variables. Burnout was found to have a statistically significant negative relationship with employee engagement, but no statistically significant relationship was found between burnout and self-perceived employability.

The findings of the study in terms of the relationship between burnout and employee engagement are strongly supported by current literature. Engaged employees tend to be in control of their work situation (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Moodley, 2010). They are happier, productive, provide better customer service, and are more competitive (Nienaber & Martins, 2015). As a result, they cope better with work challenges, they are more resilient and better manage stressful situations (Maslach, 2011; Moodley, 2010), and therefore experience lower levels of burnout.

The current study showed a negative relationship between burnout and self-perceived employability that is not statistically significant. However, recent literature reveals a negative relationship between self-perceived employability and burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). Current literature has provided supporting evidence that employees who perceive themselves employable are proactive and tend to continuously advance their knowledge and skills for career progression (Coetzee et al., 2015) and, importantly, they experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

In terms of the relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability, the results showed a positive but not significant correlation between employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Two dimensions of employee engagement, namely customer service and strategy and implementation, correlated significantly with some of the dimensions of employability. Customer service positively correlated significantly with the self-perceived employability as well as with career self-management, sociability and proactivity. By this the participants demonstrated effective skills in terms of taking care of customers' needs and providing professional quality service, while at the same time they perceived themselves as capable of facing the challenges of the organisation and or labour market by managing their careers, being sociable and innovative to remain employable. Strategy and implementation also correlated significantly and positively with career self-management and sociability. These results show that the participants felt encouraged and had positive morale about the objectives of the organisation, while at the same

time the participants perceived themselves to be effectively managing their careers and being sociable.

**3.4.3. Research aim 2: To determine whether employee engagement and self-perceived employability negatively relate with burnout amongst public sector employees**

Overall, the results of the current study provided evidence that employee engagement and self-perceived employability negatively relate with burnout. However, the correlation was only significant in terms of burnout and employee engagement, but not significant in terms of burnout and self-perceived employability.

The overall results of the current study suggest that on average the employees were experiencing less burnout and they were more engaged. This is consistent with the findings of other studies conducted on the burnout–engagement relationship that employees experiencing more engagement than burnout are more positive, committed and experience fewer symptoms of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2008).

In terms of the relationship between burnout and self-perceived employability, no statistically significant correlation was found. The results showed that on average the sample perceived themselves as employable. Considering that they also scored lower on burnout, they experienced lower levels of burnout. This is consistent with previous research studies which support the fact that employees who possess personal resources such as self-perceived employability experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

**3.4.4. Research aim 3: To determine whether the South African public sector employees from the various demographic groups (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure) differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability**

This study investigated whether the South African public sector employees from the various demographic groups differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. The demographic variables included

age, gender, racial groups, marital status, qualification and tenure. The study found biographical groups which differed significantly, mostly on self-perceived employability, and less on burnout and employee engagement.

#### *3.4.4.1. Age and marital status*

No statistically significant mean differences were found between the different groups (burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability), based on their age and marital status. Previous studies have also not found significant differences between marital status and the different groups. For instance, a study by Asgari (2012) found that there was no significant difference between the different groups regarding marital status. Anand et al, (2016) found that there is no association between the marital status and employee engagement. In terms of age, previous research findings on how different groups are influenced by age are contradictory. Some researchers found that age differs significantly across these groups (Bezuidenhout, 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003), while others have found no statistically significant mean differences between age and the different groups (burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability) (Luk et al., 2010; Shukla et al., 2015; Karli, 2016).

#### *3.4.4.2. Gender*

Significant mean differences were found between males and females in terms of self-perceived employability dimensions, entrepreneurial orientation and proactivity. The male participants scored relatively higher means on both these dimensions compared to the female participants. The results show that the male participants experienced the dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation and proactivity significantly more positively than the female participants. These findings were consistent with findings of other researchers who found that females tend to consider themselves less employable compared to men (Qenani et al., 2014; Vargas et al., 2018). The reasons for this trend could be many, including the issue of gender equality in South Africa. Government has recognised issues of gender equality and have initiated strategies and programmes towards achieving gender equality of employees in the workplace (DPSA, 2006).

#### *3.4.4.3. Race*

There were significant mean differences between race and employee engagement dimensions, namely organisational commitment and strategy implementation. The



Black group obtained higher mean scores than the White group in organisational commitment as well as strategy and implementation. This means that the Black group experienced these dimensions significantly more positively than the White group. These differences are likely to be observed in the South African government institutions when considering the South African employment equity legislation which favours the advancement and growth of Black employees as compared to White employees (Oosthuizen et al., 2014). Other studies conducted in private sector institutions showed results that were in contradiction with the findings of the study. Findings by Segal (2009), for instance, showed that Black employees tend to be less engaged in their work compared to their White counterparts.

In terms of self-perceived employability, statistically significant mean differences were found between the racial groups and self-perceived employability and its subscales. The significant mean differences were found on self-efficacy, career resilience, sociability, entrepreneurial orientation, and career self-management. The results show that the Black participants experienced self-perceived employability significantly more positively than the White participants. These findings are consistent with findings by Qenani et al. (2014), which confirmed the significant influence that race has in terms of self-perceived employability. Oosthuizen et al. (2014) found that the participants from different race groups differed significantly in terms of the entrepreneurial creativity.

#### *3.4.4.4. Qualification*

Significant mean differences were found between qualification categories and the dimensions of employee engagement, namely organisational commitment and strategy and implementation. The results showed that participants with matric and post-matric qualifications were experiencing organisational commitment significantly more positively than the graduate and postgraduate group. So, the results show a trend that employee engagement level reduces as the qualification level obtained by the participants increases. Previous studies also indicated significant mean differences on qualification. According to Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2006), employees with higher qualifications tend to be more engaged compared to those with relatively lower or no qualifications.

#### 3.4.4.5. *Tenure*

Significant mean differences were found between employee engagement and its dimensions, namely customer service, organisational satisfaction, and strategy and implementation. In all the variables listed above, the participants with less than ten years' work experience were more positively engaged in their work and organisation compared to the participants with more than ten years' work experience. Previous research does confirm a strong relationship between burnout and tenure. According to De Lange, De Witte and Notelaers (2008), employees working in a single organisation for a long time tend to show decreased levels of employee engagement, while employees with fewer years of experience are more engaged.

#### 3.4.5. **Conclusions: Implications for practice**

Approaches to reducing burnout amongst employees should consider employee engagement and self-perceived employability as effective tools to enhance employees' wellness, morale and productivity. Improving the engagement levels of employees and enhancing their employability will greatly improve the well-being of employees in public sector institutions and help alleviate the actual employee burnout.

Industrial psychologists and human resources practitioners should consider the ways in which employee engagement and self-perceived employability affect employees who are burnt out. The current study showed that employee engagement and self-perceived employability were negatively related to burnout. Though the relations were only statistically significant between burnout and employee engagement, both the constructs appeared as effective tools for reducing burnout and therefore enhance employees' wellbeing and work productivity. These findings were consistent with previous studies that provided evidence that employee engagement has been used as an intervention to erode burnout amongst employees in organisations (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Kosuta, 2010; Moodley, 2010; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). Furthermore, the empirical evidence from previous studies confirm that employees who possess more attributes of self-perceived employability experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

Strategies to alleviate or prevent burnout should consider the differences observed between age, race, tenure, qualification, gender and marital status in terms of their

employee engagement and self-perceived employability attributes. Most of the Black participants, males, those with fewer years of work experience, and the least qualified employees were relatively more engaged and possessed relatively more of the employability attributes compared to the other groups. These findings could be used to inform wellness programmes and other programmatic interventions in the workplace aimed at promoting the well-being of employees. Such programmes could enhance the understanding of these groups about how their levels of employee engagement and perceived employability influence their performance in terms of service delivery and how their health and wellness relate to their capability of being fully engaged and employable.

The findings of the study contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of industrial psychology by indicating the relationships between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability in the chosen organisation in the South African public sector, which is unique from other public sector organisations as it is a non-human services organisation. The conclusions and practical recommendations for public sector employees and organisations will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

#### **3.4.6. Limitations of the study**

The findings point to the need for further research to explore the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. Consequently, there is a need for researchers to replicate these findings in broader samples and different public sector institutions but of similar nature for more comprehensive conclusions to be drawn about the relationship.

The convenience sampling method that was utilised could be a limitation because a random sampling method may have enhanced the generalisability of the results. Also, a much bigger sample could have provided more data in terms of differences between biographical variables.

#### **3.4.7. Recommendations for future research**

Most studies investigating the issue of burnout within the public sector in South Africa were conducted within human services institutions. More studies need to be done in white-collar institutions within the public sector spectrum. Future researchers could therefore focus on the relationship between burnout and engagement outside human

services institutions of the public sector. Future researchers are also advised to investigate the relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability, and to explore whether these concepts are complementary or independent of each other.

Considering the lack of studies investigating the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector, it is recommended that future researchers replicate this study to determine whether the basic findings of the original study can be applied to other participants from different but similar institutions. In addition, more studies need to be done on this topic to confirm the validity of findings and to increase the likelihood of results being generalised to the larger population.

The empirical findings of this study confirm the existence of a relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. In addition, the study confirms the existence of significant differences between the biographical groups, racial groups and qualification groups on self-perceived employability. It is recommended that future research be conducted to investigate self-perceived employability as a psychosocial resource mechanism on the issues of burnout and employee engagement.

### **3.5. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter described the empirical study and the research methodology. An overview of the sample and population was presented. The measuring instruments were described with a motivation for the choice of each instrument. The data gathering and processing procedures were explained, and the statistical hypotheses also presented. The chapter concluded with a brief summary and integration of the research results.

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## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, conclusions are drawn in terms of the specific aims of the research and limitations are formulated in terms of the literature and empirical study. Finally, recommendations are made for future research.

#### 4.1. CONCLUSIONS

##### 4.1.1. Conclusions regarding the literature review

In terms of the literature review, the study had the following aims:

- Aim 1: To conceptualise burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst the public sector employees from a theoretical perspective.
- Aim 2: To conceptualise the theoretical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees in the literature.
- Aim 3: To determine the role played by biographical variables (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure) on burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees.
- Aim 4: To formulate recommendations for industrial psychology practices and future research.

The next section outlines the conclusions which were drawn regarding each of the research aims.

*4.1.1.1. Conclusions regarding the first research aim: To conceptualise burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst the public sector employees from a theoretical perspective.*

##### *a) Burnout*

The study referred to burnout as prolonged interpersonal stressors because of job-related stresses, associated with feelings of exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout was also seen as a multi-dimensional construct which comprises mental and emotional exhaustion,

depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (Bakker et al., 2008; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Research on burnout has stimulated a move towards positive psychology, leading to studies of positive constructs such as engagement explored as an approach to deal with the issues of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2009). Most literature on burnout within the South African context have emanated from studies in relatively stressful work environments that are related to the human services such as the police, healthcare, and social welfare (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Subsequently, literature has shown that employees in the public sector experience numerous symptoms of burnout (Bell & Bell, 2010; Fourie & Poggenpoel, 2017). However, the current study was conducted in a public sector institution which operates in a non-human services environment.

#### *b) Employee engagement*

Employee engagement was viewed not only as a strategy for organisations to gain competitive advantage (Kosuta, 2010), but also as a coping mechanism in which employees can survive symptoms of burnout (Coetzer & Rothmann, 2007). The literature showed that employee engagement is utilised in management practices as a managerial tool to achieve positive outcomes for both the individual and the organisation (Martins, 2015). Such a tool provides a favourable organisational atmosphere for the successful performance of the engaged employees (Rajani & Joshua, 2016) by promoting a healthy work environment (Nienaber & Martins, 2014).

Importantly, employee engagement has been used as a tool to reduce burnout in organisations (Maslach, 2011). Engagement is therefore seen as the best prevention strategy for burnout (Maslach, 2011). The current study adopted Martins' (2015) definition of employee engagement as employees at both the individual and organisational level who are fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work, and so take positive action to further the organisation's reputation and interests. It is associated with a positive state of mind. Employee engagement in this context comprises cognitive, emotional and behavioural components that are associated with individual role performance (Nienaber & Martins, 2016). Employee engagement is largely associated with organisational success such as commitment, involvement, attachment, discretionary effort, profound connection, energy, positive attitude and psychological presence (Gupta & Sharma, 2016).

c) *Self-perceived employability*

Self-perceived employability is the perception that people hold about themselves about their capabilities of obtaining and retaining fulfilling work, and having the knowledge, understanding, skills, experience and personal attributes to move self-sufficiently within the labour market (Coetzee et al., 2016). Self-perceived employability is associated with feelings of security and independence, motivation, and behaviours that can lead to effective negotiations, better job performance, and resilience to adversity, more successful careers, and better health and life satisfaction (Qenani et al., 2014).

The importance of wellbeing is reinforced within the self-perceived employability literature. Well-being is important to all organisations and can be enhanced by how employees perceive themselves in an organisation. According to Lu et al. (2016), high employability can protect individuals from a stressful work environment. Employees who continuously struggle to advance their employability skills over time, and self-perceive low employability as a result, are likely to associate with reduced personal accomplishment, feelings of stress and eventually burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

*4.1.1.2. Aim 2: To conceptualise the theoretical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees in the literature*

The literature reflected a negative relationship between employee engagement and burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2009) and a negative relationship between self-perceived employability and burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). Therefore, a negative relationship was found between burnout as the dependent variable and employee engagement and self-perceived employability as the independent variables.

On the one hand, the literature strongly supports the negative relationship between burnout and employee engagement. Employee engagement is associated with employees being in control of their work situation (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Moodley, 2010). They are fully absorbed by and enthusiastic about their work (Martins, 2015). They are happier, productive, provide better customer service, and are more

competitive (Nienaber & Martins, 2015). As a result, they cope better with work challenges and better manage stressful situations (Maslach, 2011; Moodley, 2010), hence have fewer burnout experiences.

On the other hand, recent literature also reveals the negative relationship between self-perceived employability and burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). Current literature has provided evidence supporting that employees who possess more attributes of self-perceived employability experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

Research has shown that employees who attest to higher levels of self-perceived employability tend to be protected from stressful work environments since they feel in charge of their careers, growth, and development (Lu et al., 2016). In contrast, when employees hold negative perceptions about themselves regarding fulfilling their work and being in control of their work situation, they are likely to associate with reduced personal accomplishment, feel stressed and may eventually feel burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

The literature also showed that self-perceived employability and employee engagement are rooted in the positive psychology paradigm (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Within the flourishing of positive psychology, the effects of these concepts are studied to improve the well-being of employees.

#### *4.1.1.3. Aim 3: To determine the role played by biographical variables (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure) in burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees*

Most of the findings on how the biographical variables influence the constructs of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability were not consistent; they differed per study. For instance, there are studies that supported that gender, age, race and tenure have significant impact on the constructs burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability (Dimunová & Nagyová, 2012; Duli, 2016; Kock & McNamara, 2018; Krajewski & Goffin, 2005; Luk et al., 2010; Shukla et al., 2015; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2003). However, numerous other studies have shown that these same biographical variables do not have any impact on the constructs

burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability (Attafar et al., 2011; Bakken & Holzemer, 2000; Bezuidenhout, 2008; Blanchard et al., 2010; Buys, 2017; Patel, 2014; Salamonson et al., 2009).

*4.1.1.4. Aim 4: To formulate recommendations for industrial psychology practices, public sector institutions and future research*

The literature study demonstrated that employee engagement and self-perceived employability are negatively related to burnout. Both the constructs appeared as effective tools for reducing burnout and therefore enhance employees' wellbeing and work productivity. Previous studies have provided evidence that employee engagement has been used as an intervention to erode burnout amongst employees in organisations (Gupta & Sharma, 2016; Kosuta, 2010; Moodley, 2010; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). Furthermore, the evidence from previous studies supports the finding that employees who possess more attributes of self-perceived employability experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

Public sector institutions should utilise employee engagement as a managerial tool to achieve positive outcomes for achieving good performance of engaged employees (Nienaber & Martins, 2014). Public sector institutions should also promote a healthy work environment for enabling employee engagement and thus the eradication of burnout and its symptoms amongst employees. In addition, public sector institutions should consider reinforcing wellbeing by means of enhancing how employees perceive themselves in an organisation. This will protect individuals from stressful work environments and burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

Industrial psychologists and future researchers should consider the ways in which employee engagement and self-perceived employability affect employees who are burnt out. They should also consider addressing the limitation of the dearth of studies with respect to the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability within the public sector.

**4.1.2. Conclusions regarding the empirical study**

In terms of the empirical study, the research had the following aims.

- Research aim 1: To determine the empirical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in a sample of public sector employees working in a non-human services sector.
- Research aim 2: To determine whether employee engagement and self-perceived employability negatively relate to burnout amongst public sector employees working in a non-human services sector.
- Research aim 3: To determine the relationship between the demographic variables (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure), burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees working in a non-human services sector.
- Research aim 4: To determine whether the South African public sector employees working in a non-human services sector, from the various demographic groups (age, gender, race, marital status, qualifications and tenure), differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.
- Research aim 5: To formulate recommendations for industrial psychology practices, public sector institutions and future research, based on the literature and empirical findings of this research regarding burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector working in a non-human services sector.

*4.1.2.1. Research aim 1: To determine the empirical relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in a sample of public sector employees working in a non-human services sector*

In terms of the results of the current study, a statistically significant negative relationship between burnout and employee engagement and a negative but not statistically significant relationship between burnout and self-perceived employability were found.

*a) Findings in terms of relationship between burnout and employee engagement*

The results of the current study in terms of the relationship between burnout and employee engagement confirmed the existence of a strong negative relationship as was found by previous studies. Numerous studies identify employee engagement as crucial for building modern public sectors and promoting the well-being of employees

in government institutions (Martins & Ledimo, 2016; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012). The results of this study therefore confirm this notion and support the stance that employee engagement can be utilised in the South African public sector to reduce burnout. This study therefore considers employee engagement as an effective tool to approach the challenges related to burnout among public sector employees to enhance service in public sector organisations.

*b) Findings in terms of the levels of burnout and employee engagement*

The results of the study showed that employees in the South African public sector, working in a non-human services government organisation, experience relatively lower levels of burnout, indicating that they do not frequently suffer from numerous physical and emotional stressors as a result of their work. Consequently, the study found relatively moderate to high levels of employee engagement, indicating that they are more engaged with their work.

The results of the study in terms of the levels of burnout and the levels of employee engagement differ from the findings of most studies conducted within the South African public sector. Within the South African public sector context, numerous studies have reflected on high levels of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Schaufeli et al., 2009). Studies have also reflected on persistent, negative, work-related issues where government departments and municipalities have to deal with numerous concerns regarding the quality of service delivery amidst limited resources (Lehohla, 2016; Rothman et al., 2003).

The reason for the differences between the findings of most previous studies in terms of the high levels of burnout found to be experienced in South African public sector organisations and the findings of the current study which indicated relatively lower levels of burnout experienced in the public sector is fundamental to the differences in the nature of work and the nature of the work environment where the studies have been conducted.

Research on burnout and engagement within the South African public sector context has mainly focused on human services occupations. There is a significant body of research on burnout in human services occupations such as police, nurses, social workers, teachers and doctors within the South African public sector context (Schaufeli



et al., 2009; Söderfeldt, Söderfeldt, & Warg, 1995). Most of these studies have reported high levels of burnout experienced by employees and low levels of employee engagement.

There is a lack of research on burnout and employee engagement conducted in non-human services occupations such as white-collar workers. The current study was conducted in a non-human services public sector organisation where the mandate is performed behind a desk (office work) and does not involve serving people directly. It mainly includes performing work at a professional, managerial, or administrative level. Based on the differences in terms of the nature of work and the nature of the work environment the study accepts the findings and recommends that future researchers conduct more studies on the subject for the purpose of generalisation, but within the South African public sector, in non-human services government organisations,.

*c) Findings in terms of the relationship between burnout and self-perceived employability*

In terms of self-perceived employability, the results in the current study showed that employees regularly self-perceive their possibilities to succeed within the organisation and or the labour market. It appears from the current study that self-perceived employability is a positive and important attribute that the public sector employees in a non-human services sector possess. The literature has emphasised the importance of self-perceived employability (Coetzee et al., 2016; Qenani et al., 2014; Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), because of the ever-changing world of work and globalisation. Therefore, organisations should always bear in mind the unprecedented need for employees to possess employability skills to improve job performance, resilience, successful careers, as well as better health and life satisfaction (Qenani et al., 2014).

In terms of the relationship between burnout and employability, the results of the study showed that a negative relationship exists between these two concepts, but this relationship was not found to be statistically significant. Therefore, inferences cannot be drawn on the relationship between burnout and self-perceived employability. However, previous research does show that self-perceived employability is a psychosocial meta-capacity or new mechanism for addressing employees' psychosocial stressors (Coetzee et al., 2016), and employees who possess self-

perceived employability as a personal resource experience fewer psychosocial stressors (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

*d) Findings in terms of the overall relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability*

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between the burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability to realise more approaches for public sector institutions to eradicate burnout. The results of this study showed the existence of a relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability in the South African public sector. Burnout was found to have a statistically significant relationship with employee engagement, but no statistically significant relationship was found between burnout and self-perceived employability.

*4.1.2.2. Research aim 2: To determine whether employee engagement and self-perceived employability negatively relate with burnout amongst public sector employees working in a non-human services sector*

As per the results of the current study, the employees were experiencing less burnout, they were more engaged and perceived themselves as employable. This trend is consistent with previous research studies which confirm that engaged employees tend to experience less burnout (Kosuta, 2010; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2012; Schaufeli et al., 2008) and employees who perceive themselves as employable tend to experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016).

The findings of the study indicate that employee engagement and self-perceived employability negatively relate with burnout, but only employee engagement strongly relates negatively with burnout. The correlation between self-perceived employability and burnout was not statistically significant, as manifested in the sample of public sector employees working in a non-human services sector. Insight into how self-perceived employability may influence employee engagement can be useful to implementing more effective interventions, as facilitating employability skills may impact how employees feel, behave and perform in their jobs (Qenani et al., 2014).

*4.1.2.3. Research aim 3: To determine whether the South African public sector employees from the various demographic groups (age, gender, race, marital*

*status, qualifications and tenure) differ significantly in their levels of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability*

The demographic variables that were investigated included age, gender, racial groups, marital status, tenure and qualification. These variables were investigated to determine whether they differed significantly in terms of burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

*a) Burnout*

An investigation to determine whether any significant differences existed between the construct burnout and various levels of biographical groups, namely age, gender, racial groups, marital status, tenure and qualification was conducted. None of biographical groupings indicated that the participants experienced levels of burnout in a significantly different way.

*b) Employee engagement*

The study also examined significant differences between engagement levels of various biographical groups that participated in the study. Significant differences were identified between the employee engagement levels in terms of race, tenure and qualification. The results indicated that the Black employees, employees with less than ten years of experience, together with employees with at least a matric or post-matric qualification, experienced the highest levels of engagement in the organisation.

*i. Race*

The first difference that was noted was that the Black population experienced the dimensions of organisational commitment as well as strategy and implementation significantly more positively than the White group. In terms of organisational commitment, the Black employees shared a common vision and mission with the organisation more positively compared to the White employees and they were more driven by delivering services satisfactorily (Martins & Ledimo, 2016). In terms of strategy and implementation, the study showed that the Black employees were more encouraged and more involved in their activities than the White group, and they seemed to align more with the organisations' environment (Martins & Ledimo, 2016). Several studies have reflected on the significant differences between ethnic groups and their levels of employee engagement, for instance findings by Segal (2009)

depicted that Blacks and Indian employees tended to be less engaged in their work compared to their White counterparts.

#### *ii. Qualification*

The second difference noted was that the participants with matric and post-matric qualifications experienced organisational commitment significantly more positively than the graduate and postgraduate groups. So, the results showed a trend that employee engagement level reduces as the qualification obtained by the participants increases. The results are similar to those of Garg (2014), which depicted that employee engagement is maximum for graduate employees but it reduces as a graduate becomes postgraduate. These findings are therefore important for public sector institutions to continuously improve the engagement levels of all employees despite their different levels of education.

#### *iii. Tenure*

The last significant difference that was noted was that the participants with less than ten years' work experience were more positively engaged to their work and the organisation compared to the participants with more than ten years' work experience. The results are similar to those of Ferguson (2007) that the longer the period employees stay with an organisation, the less engaged they become. The findings emphasise the importance of public sector institutions and management to continuously seek to improve employee engagement and to ensure employees are engaged in the long term.

#### *c) Self-perceived employability*

Significant differences between self-perceived employability and the various biographical groups that participated in the survey were also observed. The main differences were in respect of the biographical variables race and gender. The results indicated that the Black male employees perceived themselves more employable compared to the other groups.

#### *i. Race*

The study found that the perceptions of employees in terms of their employability differed significantly between ethnic groups. The Black group perceived themselves

more employable compared to the White group. This is true for the overall employability scale and its sub-scales namely career self-management self-efficacy, career resilience, sociability, and entrepreneurial orientation. This means that Black employees perceive themselves as capable of obtaining, retaining and fulfilling their work, within and outside the organisation. The results of the study differ from findings of previous researchers. Oosthuizen et al. (2014) found no significant differences in terms of race and the participants' employability attributes. Within the public sector government institutions, results of the current study can be politically justified. In the context of realising government interventions such as affirmative action in increasing employment opportunities for Blacks in South Africa (Burger & Jafta, 2010; Leonard, 2005), Black people in government institutions would tend to perceive more opportunities for employment, growth and development compared to White people. Oosthuizen et al. (2014) associated this trend with the current South African employment equity legislation which favours the advancement and growth of Black employees as compared to those of White employees.

## *ii. Gender*

Significant mean differences were found between males and females in terms of self-perceived employability dimensions, namely entrepreneurial orientation. This means that males see themselves to be innovative and creative in terms of business endeavours, relatively more than females do. These results contradicted findings of other previous studies. Koloba (2015) found that there were no statistically significant differences between perceived employability and gender in students.

Considering that government has taken initiatives to achieve gender equality (DPSA, 2006), the findings of the study should be taken as a caution that gender issues still prevail in government public sector institutions, and future researchers need to investigate more ways and strategies of achieving gender equality. In addition, the fact that the sample consisted of a majority of females could be a result of the overall gender distribution amongst the participants should also be considered.

The extent to which employees perceive themselves as employable may result from the levels of support they receive from their employer. Therefore, public sector organisations need to promote the provision of appropriate working conditions for enhanced self-perceived employability of both females and males. In particular, public

sector organisations need to enhance the psychosocial employability attributes (Oosthuizen et al., 2014) among female employees to sustain their employability in the contemporary employment market.

*4.1.2.4. Research aim 4: To formulate recommendations for industrial psychology practices, public sector institutions and future research, based on the literature and empirical findings of this research regarding burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector working in a non-human services sector*

The current study showed that employee engagement and self-perceived employability were negatively related to burnout. The relations were only statistically significant between burnout and employee engagement, and not significant in terms of burnout and self-perceived employability. However, empirical evidence from previous studies confirm that employees who possess more attributes of self-perceived employability experience fewer symptoms of burnout (De Cuyper et al., 2012; Lu et al., 2016). Industrial psychologists and future researchers should consider conducting more studies on the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability, particularly in the public sector.

The study indicates that areas of focus may be ensuring that employees from all races and both genders share a common vision and mission with the organisation to ensure service delivery as well as encouraging employee involvement of all employees from various biographical groups to be engaged. Public sector institutions need to be careful of issues of race and gender inequalities when promoting employee engagement and when enhancing the employability of employees. They also need to implement strategies to ensure that they motivate all employees, particularly the most qualified candidates, and support them to realise their full potential, keep them motivated and also enhance their perceptions of employability. In addition, attention should also be paid to employees who have been in the organisation for a longer period. Strategies to keep them enthusiastic and fully absorbed in their jobs should be formulated.

#### **4.1.3. Conclusions regarding the central hypothesis**

The central hypothesis of the study was: *There is a significant relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability as manifested in the South African public sector non-human services institution.*

As per the results of the study, a statistically significant relationship between burnout and employee engagement was found; however, the relationship with self-perceived employability was not significant. Therefore, the central hypothesis could not be supported. Further discussion of the relationship between the three constructs was provided in section 4.1.2.

#### **4.1.4. Conclusions regarding contributions to the field of industrial and organisational psychology**

The study has added value both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study has contributed to the existing body of knowledge on burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability. In addition, the study has contributed towards closing the identified gap in the literature on the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst public sector employees working in a non-human services sector. Practically, the study has indicated the important relations between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability.

The simultaneous implications of employee engagement and self-perceived employability in the contemporary world of work which presents employees with continuous psychosocial stressors were observed. Fostering employee engagement in an organisation is seen as a positive outcome when alleviating burnout since it focuses on the individual's involvement and satisfaction and enthusiasm for work (Nienaber & Martins, 2016). Similarly, self-perceived employability also contributes positively in the reduction of burnout since it focuses on addressing employees' psychosocial stressors such as psychosocial meta-capacities of employability (Coetzee et al., 2016). Practitioners can greatly benefit from understanding the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability to advance performance and wellbeing.

Industrial and organisational psychology as the scientific discipline of human behaviour in the work context should focus on scientific knowledge when managing the challenges of burnout in the workplace. It should also focus on improving the work performance and quality of life of employees by increasing literature on and promoting approaches such as employee engagement and self-perceived employability to organisations of diverse environments.

## **4.2. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Limitations of this study are discussed in terms of the literature review and the empirical study.

### **4.2.1. Limitations of the literature review**

There was a glaring limitation of literature which focused on burnout, engagement and self-perceived employability beyond the traditional human services occupations in public sector institutions. In addition, there were also limited studies on the topic in the public sector within the South African context. Most studies on burnout and engagement were conducted on occupations which mainly involve complex social situations, such as doctors, nurses, members of the police services, and teachers. Very limited studies have been conducted in the South African context that focus on burnout and employee engagement beyond the human services occupations such as managers, and white and blue-collar employees in both the private and public sectors.

Furthermore, research on self-perceived employability has focused largely on the school-to-work transition context and within academic contexts. There is a lack of research which investigates self-perceived employability in working adults, and even worse in the public sector.

### **4.2.2. Limitations of the empirical study**

The reliability and validity of the measures used in the study were based on a sound theoretical framework. The limitations were related to the exploratory nature of the research design. The correlational design was limited to examining only the strength and direction of the relations between the variables which were studied. This means conclusions about causation cannot be made.



Due to the application of the convenience sampling approach, an unequal distribution of the participants in terms of gender groups was obtained, causing the need for the study to be replicated in broader samples and different public sector institutions but of a similar nature, for more comprehensive conclusions to be drawn about the relationship. In addition, as the convenience sampling method was used, results are also not generalisable whereas a random sampling method may have improved the generalisability of the findings.

#### **4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICAL USE AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

##### **4.3.1. Recommendations regarding burnout issues in the public sector and wellbeing**

Public sector institutions in South Africa should continuously seek to maximise engagement levels and employability of employees within organisations. Public sector organisations should always aspire to enhancing the engagement levels of employees as this will ensure that employees are motivated by and fully absorbed in their work (Martins, 2015). They should also consider employee engagement as the best prevention strategy of burnout. Public sector organisations should further ensure that they develop the employees' employability skills, as this will be positive for the organisation. Research has shown that self-perceived employability may result in improved job performance, resilience, successful careers, improved health and life satisfaction as well as reduced burnout (Qenani et al., 2014).

The public sector wellness programmes and interventions should consider the differences observed between the gender, race, qualification and tenure groups in terms of their engagement levels and self-perceived employability. These differences, as they highlight the different needs of the employees in terms of their engagement and employability, could be used to guide intervention programmes as well as facilitate discussions in the institution of participants in order to help these groups to understand how their engagement and employability relate to their health and the reduction of burnout and ultimately to effective service delivery.

It is therefore important for government as the employer of public sector employees to consider improving both employee engagement and employability skills of employees

to sustain their competitiveness in a contemporary changing, increasingly uncertain and turbulent work environment.

#### **4.3.2. Future research**

Considering that most previous studies focused mostly on issues of burnout within the public sector human services institutions, it is recommended that researchers conduct future research on this topic and shift their focus to white-collar institutions within the public sector spectrum. Future researchers can therefore focus on the relationship between burnout and engagement outside human services institutions of the public sector.

It is recommended that future researchers replicate this study to determine whether the basic findings of the original study can be applied to other participants from different but similar institutions. In addition, more studies need to be done on this topic to confirm the validity of the findings and to increase the likelihood of results being generalised to the larger population.

Future researchers could also investigate the relationship between employee engagement and self-perceived employability, using different research designs, and should consider much broader samples to explore whether these concepts are complementary or independent of each other.

#### **4.4. CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The study has demonstrated how the South African public sector in the non-human services occupations may be affected by issues of burnout. The study further showed how approaches such as employee engagement and self-perceived employability may be utilised to alleviate burnout issues. In addition, it has demonstrated the levels of effectiveness of these two concepts in reducing burnout as based on previous literature and the findings of the current study.

Conclusions were drawn in terms of the specific aims of the research and limitations were formulated in terms of the literature and empirical study. Finally, recommendations were made for future research.

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## **APPENDIX A: LETTER OF CONSENT**

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**Research title: The relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector.**

Ms Ntombifuthi Zwane is conducting a study on the above mentioned topic. You are kindly requested to participate in this research study which will contribute to the completion of a Masters of Commerce degree in Industrial Psychology. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a permanent employee of DIRCO who can add valuable input to the data gathered in this study

#### **1. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is determine the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector

#### **2. Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be requested to answer the questions/statements in the questionnaires in all honesty. To ensure confidentiality kindly return the survey to designated person. The questionnaire will be hand delivered to you by the main researcher. A consent form will be given for you to indicate your consent. Should you decide not to participate, you do not have to complete the surveys.

There is no right or wrong responses to questions. You can complete the questionnaire at a time of your convenience. The estimated time to complete the questionnaire is not more than 45 minutes

#### **3. Potential risks and discomforts**

Participation in this study does not subject anyone to any risk. The only inconvenience is the time that it takes to complete the questionnaire. This information will not be shared with management. Management and the department will only be provided

feedback on the aggregated findings of the research and not on any individual responses.

#### **4. Potential benefits to subjects and/or to society**

Participation in this study has no direct benefit to the individual participant. The study will contribute towards a better understanding of the relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability

All the participants in this research will receive a copy of the final thesis on request.

#### **5. Payment for participation**

There is no payment for participation.

#### **6. Confidentiality**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential, will be used solely and only for purposes of knowledge generation. As a matter of confidentiality, the questionnaires will be secured in the Department of Industrial Psychology and data analysis will be computerized. Both the questionnaires and data will only be accessible to myself and my supervisor. The data will be saved on a password protected file and the questionnaires will be locked away.

#### **6. Participation and withdrawal**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to participate in this study you may withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study.

#### **7. Identification of investigators**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact: Ntombifuthi Zwane at [nnzwane.nz@gmail.com](mailto:nnzwane.nz@gmail.com) or 0768097420.

#### **8. Rights of research subjects**



You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this study.


## 10. Consent


Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntarily. You can indicate your consent to participate in the study by in the relevant box below:

I agree to participate	
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I do not agree to participate	
----------------------------------	--

## APPENDIX B: ETHICS LETTER OF APPROVAL

 UNISA   university of south africa	
<b>UNISA CEMS/IOP RESEAERCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE</b>	
10 May 2018	NHREC Registration # : (if applicable) ERC Reference # : <b>2018_CEMS/IOP_011</b> Name : Ntombifuthi Zwane Student #: 50782630 Staff #: N/A
Dear Ms N Zwane	
<b>Decision: Ethics Approval from 10 May 2018 to 10 May 2021</b>	
<b>Researcher(s):</b> Ms Ntombifuthi Zwane <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:Nzwane.nz@gmail.com">Nzwane.nz@gmail.com</a> <b>Telephone:</b> 072 612 3811, (w) 012 351 0322	
<b>Supervisor (s):</b> Prof R M Goshuizen <b>E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:rgoshuiz@unisa.ac.za">rgoshuiz@unisa.ac.za</a> <b>Telephone:</b> 087 402 9397 (w) 012 429 8245	
<b>Working title of research:</b>  <b>The relationship between burnout, employee engagement and self-perceived employability amongst employees in the South African public sector</b>	
<b>Qualification:</b> Post-graduate degree purposes (MCOM)	
Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa CEMS/IOP Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for 3 years	
<i>The low risk application was reviewed by the CEMS/IOP Ethics Review Committee on 8 May 2018 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.</i>	
The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.</li><li>2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the CEMS/IOP Committee.</li><li>3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.</li></ol>	



University of South Africa  
Private Bag 196, Tuksdam, 1937, Pretoria, South Africa  
PO Box 215, 1854 0903 South Africa  
Telephone: +27 12 651 1111 Fax: +27 12 651 4153  
[www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

## APPENDIX C: EDITORS' DECLARATION

### Declaration: Editing of Dissertation

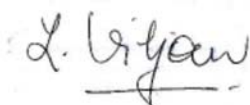
16 October 2018

To Whom It May Concern

#### Language Editing

This is to certify that I have edited the language of the dissertation of **Zwane Ntombifuthi** submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Master of Commerce in the subject Industrial and Organisational Psychology at the University of South Africa, titled: *The Relationship Between Burnout, Employee Engagement and Self-Perceived Employability Amongst Employees in the South African Public Sector*.

Feedback about the work has been provided to the candidate.



**Leonie Viljoen, PhD (UCT)**  
Language Practitioner  
Cell: 082 9244 733

#### Technical editing

I, Ronel Gallie, acknowledge that I did the technical formatting, checking of reference list and cross-referencing of the dissertation of **Zwane Ntombifuthi**. Feedback about the work done has been provided to the candidate.



**Ronel Gallie**  
Technical editor  
084 7780 292

